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VOL. 167.

A LIFE'S ATONEMENT

BY

D. CHRISTIE MURRAY
Author of "Joseph's Coat" &c.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

Vol. I.

HAMBURG.
KARL GRÄDENER & J. F. RICHTER.
1881.

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A NOVEL

BY

DAVID CHRISTIE MURRAY

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BIBLIOTHECA
REGIA
MONACENSIS

PREFACE.

OUTSIDE these pages, Bolter's Rents are unreformed. They are uglier, in fact, than any fictionist dare paint them.

It might be startling to know how much of the wealth of City Companies is spent in egregious feasting, in any wicked and wasteful year, whilst a score of such places stand untouched in the world's capital.

D. C. M.

A LIFE'S ATONEMENT.

CHAPTER I.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY.

The day was wintry and the sunlight ghostly when a wintry and a ghost-like apparition came upon me.

THE first thing I remember is a narrow little patch of garden, surrounded by high walls of brick, and ended by a brick-paved yard. The day was wintry and the sunlight ghostly when Memory presented me with her first photograph. I am able to recall the time quite clearly, and nothing seems clearer than the complete absence of emotion which followed the statement that I was an orphan. Sally, the one grim but faithful domestic of our fallen house, brought me the news with tears. I received it with a childish stoicism. Playing dismally an hour afterwards in that chill winter sunlight about the bricked yard

and the frowsy and ill-kept garden, I was seized and violently caressed by our old servant. There Memory's negative suddenly comes to an edge, and the time that followed has, for a space, no pictures for me. Just that little snatch of light comes in between two blanks. I find by reference to dates that the first blank had lasted just three years. The next lasted a month only. Poor little touch of childish memory!—a sterile halting-place between two deserts of shade and night.

I did not know until afterwards how utterly alone and desolate I was, and how narrow a chance I had of finding a home in the neighbouring union workhouse.

I sit here in my chambers, and bid the footlights spring up, and set the orchestra tuning their instruments. The curtain rises. The first picture appears, and—to what sad and sweet music—the panorama glides along!

I have heard so much from that good and faithful servitor, that the month I have spoken of has lost its blank unreality, and grown to be as real as the rest. Sally Troman took me from the house which Death and Debt had made untenantable, and carried me to her mother's cottage, a queer little establishment, with a set of green wooden palings round it, and with two little patches of garden in front, each about the size of a hearthrug. The tiny garden was filled with two odoriferous growths of shrub. What their scientific

name might be I cannot say, but they were always spoken of as "old man" and "old woman." The sexes dwelt apart, and were held separate by a small quarried footway, flanked on either side by a double row of oyster-shells. The house itself, partly by reason of its quaint architecture, and partly by reason of the fact that, from earth to chimney-top, it was covered with oyster-shells, had always, to my childish eye, the aspect of a helpless mollusc. The molluscous tribes seemed richly represented close at hand. Gigantic oyster-shells, from three to six feet wide, were piled about the ragged fields, or lay strewn upon the grimy mounds of that desolate region. I recognise them now as furnace-refuse; but as I wandered about the place in those days, though the right royal prince Gargantua had not then been introduced to me, I often pictured a huge figure, standing before some elysian and mountainous oyster-stall, wielding a vinegar bottle and a pepper caster of the size of the parish church-tower, emptying five of those enormous shells of their esculent inhabitants, and paying for his alfresco feast one Brobdingnagian penny.

Walking up the quarried footway, Mrs. Troman's visitor found progress barred by a sort of grated wooden portcullis. This was intended to keep me from straying beyond the household ken; and I was so far like a baron of the middle ages, that the passer-by might guess by the position of the portcullis whether I was at home or abroad.

Having passed this barrier, you had three steps to go down. Those steps and the floor beyond them were of red quarries, and clean as scrubbing could make them. The kitchen had a low but ample firegrate; a fender of bent steel, polished till the flat round plate on its top looked in the firelight like a rising wintry sun; a sturdy unclothed deal table with red legs; a nondescript couch covered with chintz, cold, crackly, shining, and comfortless; a mirror, hint of far-off gentility somewhere, hanging on the wall between the table and the couch; and an old clock, which, being too tall for the apartment, was accommodated with a well to stand in. The mirror was a small affair, bound by miniature columns of fluted gold with florid ornamentation on the pediments, and the glass was seamed and scratched and blotted until it looked like a page from some faded atlas. The tall old clock regarded me as an intruder from the first moment of my arrival, bullying me solemnly, even in Sally's presence, and frightening me with monitory tickings when I sat alone. Its face represented one of the heavenly bodies—the moon, I fancy—a foolish, staring, futile sort of countenance, which always seemed to me like a dead mask with a living face behind it, the living face to which the voice belonged that ticked the seconds so remorselessly.

The country round about was very dreary. The normal colour of the sky was a dull and

darkish slate, with an occasional touch of blue in it, by way of a summer wonder. The district in its general outlines was as flat as a scene in Holland; but it had about it here and there mountains of slag and cinder and mine-refuse, and was excavated here and there into clay mines, and was in all directions harried and broken up as if by a small and fretful volcanic agency. An agency not powerful enough for any great upheaval, but with just sufficient strength to fret and worry the surface of the patient earth in this way. Not an extinct volcanic agency by any means; for there was always on the edge of the dull sky a lurid gleam; and always you might hear a shuddering boom which shook the air; and always, move where you might, you were engirt by smoke and flame. The heavy skeleton frames at the heads of coal-pits were thick on the landscape, waiting, as I used to fancy, like huge spiders, for the flies which came up from below, drawn cunningly and swiftly by a gliding line into their ugly grasp, to be dropped again empty.

This was my childish environment. At the age of four or thereabouts—Sally's fund of scholarship being by that time exhausted—I was sent to school. The seminary I attended was presided over by a very dirty old woman, who smoked a short clay pipe. What sort of scholastic regimen I had, it is scarcely worth while to say. Reading and writing, says Dogberry, come by nature; and

less by reason of any assistance than by force of nature I learned to read. I spent my infrequent pence in the purchase of literary stores. Not far from Sally's house was a small shop with a single bleared and dirty window. This window was covered at night-time by a shutter which hung downward, having its hinges on the upper casement, so that during the day it was necessary to prop it up with sticks, and thus convert it into a kind of roof. Under that frail shelter I have often stood in rainy weather to spell through one large-typed page of Jack the Giant-killer, or the legend of Simple Simon. Stories of Bluebeard and Blueskin —whom I regarded as a kind of literary twins— were there also; and the library included further the narratives of the lives of Sixteen-stringed Jack and Three-fingered Jack, another pair of twins. They were all illustrated by outrageous cuts, loosely slopped over with water colours in such wise that the crimson hue of Bluebard's turban incarnadined the clouds, and his yellow boots overflowed the foreground.

In the way of literature, Sally's house was not altogether unprovided. The *Pilgrim's Progress* and the *Holy War*, a mutilated copy of the *Arabian Nights*, a Family Bible—including the Apocrypha and several incredible steel engravings —and a fat volume containing *Zadig*, *The Devil on two Sticks*, *Roderick Random*, and *Gil Blas*, made up the library. How these books had been

got together, or to whom they had belonged, I never knew; but they were to me such a source of infinite enchantment as I shall not cease to be affectionately grateful for. It is not the least among the joys they brought that they made that dismal Black Country lovely in my eyes, filling it —as they did—with all manner of sweet associations, which have lasted until now. For even now, *Gil Blas,* when I rejoin him in his adventures, parts from his uncle at the corner of Yew Tree Lane; and Benjamin, whenever I renew acquaintance with him, is seized, with the golden cup in his sack, in front of Pleasant Row Cottages.

The day was wintry and the sunlight ghost-like when a wintry and a ghost-like apparition came upon me. I was playing alone. I always did play alone; for Sally had a mighty idea of my gentility, and sternly forbade all avoidable contact with aboriginal infancy. I was naturally a little shy, and more than a little given to the building of wonderful castles. I preferred to exercise my architectural art alone; and had wandered away over the grimy pit-mound fronting on Sally's house, along the slimy canal which ran behind that Apennine, over the little Dutch-looking bridge, and into a certain mangy meadow, which then represented to me the very heart of Nature's solitude. At the end of this meadow was a delicious terror —a yawning precipice, which seemed to me of Alpine depth and grandeur, although more recent visits

assure me that this dreadful chasm is as mere a clay-mine as any in the county. Beyond it the earth burned slowly, always, and the place was Bunyan's Valley of the Shadow of Death in dull weather, and on sunshiny days it was Sinbad's Valley of Diamonds. It was surrounded by a rickety wooden fence; and one of my delights was to hang over a broken stump, and—blinding myself from all knowledge of earth and sky—to give myself the fearsome pleasure of falling in fancy over that sheer precipice. This got to be a regular part of my nightly dreams at last, and I did what I chose with the fancy, asleep or awake. I fell swiftly, and, suspending myself half-way, winged a leisurely spiral way upwards. I went head foremost or feet foremost, like a stone, and came without a shock to the bottom. Without ever having heard of Mr. Guppy, I was the equal of either, so far as voluntary levitation went. On the particular day I speak of I had got to my favourite stump, and after a lengthier waiting than usual, had just begun my delicious unwholesome journey, when I was startled out of the fancy by a sound which very nearly startled me into the fact. The sound was that of a quick footstep. So near I was to being startled into the fact, that if the man whose approach had broken my dream had not taken me by the petticoats, I should inevitably have fallen over. I was so energetically plucked from danger that I was thrown a yard or two into the meadow; and

having had just time to be dreadfully frightened, and seeing that it was a stranger who had both frightened and rescued me, the proper thing for me at the moment appeared to be to cry. The man stood and looked at me, and frightened me still more. He was a young man, and evidently belonged to a very superior class to that I commonly mixed with or commonly saw. He had rings on his fingers, for instance, and wore a gold chain. He was well dressed, or rather his clothes were made of good material and looked new; but they were torn and splashed from head to foot. On his left side he had a streak of dry white mud from shoulder to knee. His face was handsome, but haggard beyond all description, and his lips were drawn back from the teeth in a very remarkable way. I have seen the same look on a dead face since then; but I had never seen it before, and it frightened me horribly. His hair was very wildly disarranged, and there was a dark blur of unshaven beard on cheek and chin. He stood and stared at me after having pitched me into the meadow; and when I had once or twice stolen a look at him, I grew so desperately frightened that I did not even dare to cry.

"What were you doing there?" he asked me.

I made no answer; and he muttered to himself, "That's an act of Providence, anyway. I startle him into it, and I drag him out of it.

Couldn't Providence have done as much for me, I wonder?"

There he laughed, and sat down on the grass at a little distance.

"Who are you?" he asked suddenly. "What's your name?"

I managed somehow to say "Johnny Campbell."

"Got any friends, Johnny Campbell?" he asked me.

I responded, "Yes, sir," with inward quaking.

"Then go home," he said, "and tell them not to let you wander about in this wild way."

"Yes, sir," I answered again, still in fear of his lips and his eyes.

He did not move, and I was too frightened to do so.

"What's to-day?" he asked me.

I told him "Tuesday."

Then he mused for a while, and plucked a few blades of grass, and ate them slowly.

"How old are you?" he demanded, after this pause.

"Nearly seven," I told him.

"Are you a sharp lad?" he questioned. "Do you know how far it is from here to London?"

I made shift to tell him there was mile-stone not far off which said it was a hundred and sixteen miles; to which he responded "Nonsense."

Then he ate another blade or two of grass,

and said to himself, though he looked hard at me the while, "Let me see. Five days. And a life taken, and a life put in danger, and a life saved."

He rose then, and after a glance over the broken railings, he looked back at me, and laughed, and said, "There are better chances than that in the world, even yet, Johnny Campbell."

With that he went away. What trick Memory plays me, I can guess; but he seemed to me rather to vanish into air than to disappear in any common fashion. I sat and cried, and shivered for a little while, and then went home, to find that day made doubly memorable.

When I reached Sally's house I was still crying. The man had thrown me into a spot in the mangy meadow where the grass was covered with wet clay. I was not at all hurt; but I had covered my face and hands with tear-moistened soil, and came as a perfect shock on Sally, when I entered the kitchen.

"Oh, you dreadful, tiresome, dirty child!" cried Sally, making a dart at me and recoiling. "Oh dear, dear! It's them nasty lads, I know. There; take off your pinner, and don't stand staring at me like a blue dog in a dark entry." Sally's similes were all of an extravagantly unlikely sort, and this of the blue dog in the dark entry was the one in especial use in all cases of emergency or surprise. "Come an' be washed. Them dreadful lads! I'd like to make a end o' the lot

of 'em, that I would. You've been playin' with that there Johnny Wardle, *I* know."

There Sally made a sudden courtesy. "I beg your pardon, ma'am. I didn't see as anybody was here. What might you be pleased to want, ma'am? Will you take a seat, ma'am?"

I turned round, and seeing that a stranger had entered the house, took refuge behind the clock. The stranger was an elderly lady, dressed in deep mourning. She was very set and stately in speech; but her face and voice were inviting. I have since then lost my childish faculty for reading faces; but in all my childish experiences, I was never once deceived in that regard, and certainly in them all had never lighted on a face which attracted me so much. The lady, in spite of Sally's invitation, remained standing.

"Your name," she asked, "is Troman?"

"Yes, ma'am," returned Sally. "At your service, ma'am."

"You lived for some years, I think, with Mrs. John Campbell of Heath House?"

"Yes, ma'am," said Sally. "Pore dear lady. I went to live with her when her got married, and I lived with her till her died, and see her die."

"Yes; I have heard of you and of your faithful service"—Sally courtesied—"and of your kindness to her child." Sally courtesied again. "Is that the child?"

"I'm regular ashamed to show him, ma'am,"

said Sally, bringing me from behind the clock; "but I wanted the kitchen to do my ironin' in, and so I let him go out and play himself, an' them nasty lads about here has been and rolled him again, I suppose."

By that phrase Sally signified the method by which certain of the young democrats of that region revenged themselves upon me for her proclamation of my unfitness to associate with "the likes o' them." It was their occasional practice to seize me when I strayed away from home, and to roll me in any conveniently muddy spot, until I assumed the aspect of an earthen image.

"Will you oblige me," said the lady, "by washing him?"

"Certainly, ma'am; I was just agoing to do it," Sally explained.

"So I saw," responded the lady, and seated herself.

"Though, goodness gracious knows," said Sally as she took me in hand, "as he was sent out this blessed mornin' as neat as ever was new pin, ma'am."

I was forthwith taken away and washed and brushed, and having been inducted into clean socks and a new pinafore, was brought back to the kitchen. Then the lady asked me to sit upon her knee, and I did so.

"I suppose," she asked Sally, "that you knew

nothing of this young gentleman's relatives—of his parents' relatives, I mean?"

"No, ma'am," Sally answered. "I didn't know as he had a soul in the world as ud own him."

"I," said the lady, "am his aunt. My name is Campbell. Mr. John Campbell—your old master, the child's father—was my husband's brother. I believe he has no nearer relative than myself, and I propose to take charge of him."

I looked across at Sally, and slipping from the lady's lap, ran to my old protectress. She took me up, and put her firm red arms about me.

"No, ma'am," said Sally, in a sort of quiet desperation. "I can't dream o' partin' from the child."

"But you must see," said the lady "that it cannot be for his advantage to live here."

"It ud be cruel, ma'am," said Sally with a gulp, "to part me and the child."

"It would be far more cruel to the child to leave him here; and I am his natural guardian."

"Well, ma'am", said Sally, "I've been his unnat'ral guardian now for pretty nigh four year, ma'am. I should like to know, ma'am, why he ain't been sought after? I took him out of his poor dead father's arms, I did, and brought him home along with me and rared him, and didn't get no nat'ral guardians coming to ask a word about him."

"I was away from England when Mr. Campbell died. Your question is a very natural one,

and your conduct does you very great credit. You shall be well paid for what you have done."

I was staring hard at the lady all this time, and I noticed that she blushed deeply a moment after she had said this. I think it was at Sally's start of wounded indignation.

"You'll have to prove those words, as you're his aunt, ma'am," said Sally very quietly, and folding me tightly in her arms. "But if you are his aunt, ma'am, I suppose I can't hinder you from taking him. But oh, ma'am," cried Sally, gripping me still harder in her earnestness, "treat him kind. He hasn't been used to no mother-in-lawrin'." There Sally cried very heartily.

The lady answered, "I hear an excellent account of you, and the vicar's wife assures me that you are a good domestic. Are you willing to take service? I have no doubt that I can find a place for you in my brother's household."

"Will the child be there?" asked Sally.

The lady inclined her head and answered, "Yes."

"Then, oh ma'am," answered Sally, rising with me in her arms— "then, oh ma'am, how glad and willin'!"

"When can you be ready to go?" her visitor asked.

"I can be ready a'most as soon as you like, ma'am," said Sally, setting me down and wiping her eyes with her apron. "When mother comes

in, I can tell her as I've got a place, and pack and start a'most at once, ma'am."

"Then," said the lady, rising, "be ready for me at ten o'clock to-morrow. You will want to buy some things for the child. Let them be handsome, but plain and good. You know how a gentleman's child should be dressed, I suppose?"

"Oh yes, ma'am," Sally answered. "He's rather shabby now; but I've done my best with him."

"I am very grateful to you for it," replied her visitor; "and when I spoke of paying you for your trouble, I did not wish you to think that I meant only by money. This will serve you for such purchases as you will find it necessary to make. Pack for him, if you please, only such things as will be fit for his use when he reaches home."

With that the stately lady set a piece of thin and rustling paper on the table; and having kissed me, and said good-day to Sally, she went away. My devoted guardian followed her to the door and made a a final obeisance, and then ran back into the kitchen and took me up in one confused armful and sat down with me on the nondescript couch. There she kissed and cried over me. I cried for company, until Sally set me down and exclaimed, "Bless the child's heart alive! what's he got to cry for? I knowed as heaven ud never leave the

little innocent to grow up in a place like this. Didn't I, Johnny?" And therewith she knelt down by me and renewed her tears.

CHAPTER II.

HISTORY.

There was trouble here, as elsewhere, after all.

A HOUSE with many gables. A quaint, red-bricked old building, half overgrown with ivy, and bosomed high in trees. A house on an island, which joined east and west to the mainland by two rustic wooden bridges thrown across the pleasant river. The place—built at half-a-dozen different eras—had some sign of having been fortified once upon a time. Cromwell's people were answerable for a few of its gables. There was still a remnant of a grey stone wall, over which, as the country legends told, the men of Red Rose and of White fought bloodily one peaceful summer evening. It was an old, old house, and of a pleasant aspect. The flush of its red brickwork was like that of a ripe old age. The ivy curled tenderly about its corners, and draped them with a beauty not their own. The river went calmly round the island, and the opulent landcape on either side smiled peacefully with many a cornfield. There is no fairer region at this day in all the fair western county. There

is no place a painter might better love to study, or a wearied Londoner more rejoicingly dwell in, anywhere. And the whole scene had about it a sweet and balmy air of rest. In the trees the rooks were cawing with afternoon solemnity. The kine stood udder-deep in grass, and switched the flies from their flanks in lazy contentment. The bells of a distant church were ringing a wedding peal. One could have closed his eyes here, and lying broadcast at the riverside, have listened to the waving boughs and the laughing river, and the humming gnats and the chattering rooks, and all the sweet and grateful sounds of country life, until at last he might have fancied that this was the sort of peace which belonged to the world in the old time before Care was born.

The heat of summer was in the air. The peace of summer was on the river, and on the fields, and on the murmuring trees. Such sounds as lived could only serve to make the general silence sweeter.

But there was trouble here, as elsewhere, after all.

There were two young fellows walking up the lane which led from Wrethedale to the western bridge. They went in silence for awhile, and one of them, olive-complexioned and heavily-moustached, switched viciously with his walkingstick at the ferns and fox-gloves. He was a handsome young fellow, with some affectations in dress, which seemed

to bespeak him an artist. He wore a bronze-coloured velvet jacket, for instance, and his wide-awake hat was of the same material. He carried between a daintily gloved finger and thumb a well-blacked meerschaum. His companion, who regarded him wistfully, was by some two or three years his elder, and whilst much fairer in complexion and slighter in build, bore a strong resemblance to him. As they walked, the younger grew more and more vicious in his cuts at the foxgloves, and the elder more and more anxious in his looks. When they reached the bridge they paused.

"It's not a bit of use, Will," said the younger. "You *must* do it, and you must rely on me. I promise faithfully that I'll raise the money. I know I can raise it long enough before the time comes."

"You didn't raise it last time, Frauk," returned the elder. "I don't see how I am to help you." He spoke decisively, but with a sympathetic voice and manner.

The other turned away angrily, and answered, "That's all nonsense. You have but to sign your name, and the thing's done. If that fellow should come down upon me, and the governor should know of it, it would break his heart."

"But, Frank," returned the elder, "I had the greatest possible trouble in meeting the last, and this is even larger. I don't want to say anything hard, but I think I know you better than you

know yourself. If you get out of this scrape, you'll just go quietly back to London, and be very careful for a week, and be very careless for three months afterwards. Then you'll suddenly wake up to the fact that there's another bill to meet, and that you can't meet it. I am sure I should not be able to meet it, if I should accept it and you should fail."

Frank made no reply, but stooping, gathered a handful of loose pebbles, and dropped them one by one into the stream.

"Is there no other way?" the elder asked. "Can't you get the man to wait?"

"Can't I get the tide to wait? Can't I persuade Nelson's Column to take a walk down Fleet Street? Look here! If I don't pay Tasker off at once, he either has me in his clutches for ever and drains me dry, once, and twice, and thrice, and again; or he comes down here, presents himself to the governor, and qualifies him for a coffin. Because that's exactly what it means. You know that, Will, as well as I do."

The other shook his head in a mournful way, as not at all disputing this unpleasant view of things.

"Well now, on the other hand," the younger resumed, "all you have to do is to put your name to a piece of paper, and to make yourself easy about the rest. I'm sure I'm sorry I didn't pay the other; but I give you my word of honour I

will meet this. Now, old man, trust me. Give me a chance."

"Frank," says the elder, "if I had the money, I would give it to you with all my heart. You ought to know that. And you ought to know what signing that bill may mean. You know your own affairs better than I can know them, a great deal better than you let me know them. Before you ask me to repose so much confidence in you, you should repose a little in me."

"It's a shameful business," said the other doggedly, "and so much I have told you already. I won't humble myself by telling you more. You can help me if you like; and if you don't like you can kill the governor."

"That's a very happy specimen of your way of reasoning," said Will, with a little scorn in his voice; "and quite in accordance with what I've seen in you for some time past."

Frank turned round on him fiercely.

"You're a pretty brother! A nice, kindly, trustful, amiable brother! Well, take your way. I wash my hands of it. I have done. I have made the only appeal it was in my power to make. I find it rejected, and there's nothing for it but to go back and hang myself." With that he threw his elbows savagely on the rail of the little bridge and stared moodily at the water.

"I wish you would use a little commonsense, Frank, and be a little reasonable," the elder brother

pleaded in a nervous way. "You can't wash your hands of it, except by paying the debt and amending your life."

Frank made no answer, until the elder put a hand upon his shoulder, with an appeal: "Come, Frank, I don't want to speak too harshly, and you know that I'll help you all I can."

"The fact is," Frank replied savagely, "that I'm a selfish, egotistical beast. You're quite right, Will, and you don't say to me half I deserve. But I do really believe that I'm honest in saying that I am a thousand times more concerned for the governor than I am for myself. I've acted like a fool and a villain; and if the punishment hit nobody but me, I could bear it."

"Frank! Frank!" exclaimed the elder, "you confess too easily."

"*I* know," said Frank impatiently. "You're right again. I'm a shallow, good-for-nothing beast, and the only grace I have is that I can be sometimes brought to own it."

"The worst of that is," Will murmured inwardly, "that you think an admission a repentance." Then aloud: "Don't you think, Frank, that if you allowed me to explain all this to the governor, that the thing might by honorably arranged? I don't like this underhand way of doing things. Why should you and I go about drawing and accepting bills?"

"The governor shall never know it with my

consent. "Why should you ask me to shame myself in that way? Why need he know it? Why need he be grieved with it?"

"Will you give me your promise that you'll not wait for the bill to become due before you begin to think about meeting it?"

"By Jove! I'll do anything on earth," the other answers. "I'll live on bread and cheese—I'll work like ten men. I wish I could get you to believe me. I know I came down here and made professions or reform before; but this has been such a wearing grind of anxiety, that I shall never involve myself in such a way again."

"Will you do this?" said the elder. "Will you promise to send me half the amount of the bill the week before it falls due? If you'll undertake to do that, I'll undertake to meet the bill, and you can pay me the balance afterwards. I shall have a little loose coin then."

"Bill, you're a brick!" exclaimed the younger. "Will I do it? Won't I do it? I tell you there's nothing in the world I wouldn't do."

"Or couldn't do?" queried Will. "I don't want to know what you are willing to do, but what you are able to do. Can you do it? Don't speculate. Be sure."

"I can do it," Frank replied; and I promise you that I will."

"Remember, Frank," said the elder with a

grave and anxious face, and with his hand again on his brother's shoulder.

"And remember, Will," said the other gaily, "that I am not an utterly abandoned cut-throat yet. I shall have to grow a little in that direction before I can neglect a thing like this, and make you such a villainous return for all your kindness. It sha'n't cost you a farthing. I'm going to turn over a new leaf. I have had enough and a great deal more than enough of this business. I'll slave away like Old Boots when I get back. I'm to be R.A. in half-a-dozen years at the outside. Watch the career of this talented young artist, and see what becomes of him."

And with that the handsome young gentleman cocked his velvet hat a little more than usual, and struck a theatrical attitude. At this the elder laughed. The two suddenly shook hands, and then without further parley crossed the bridge together, passed a swinging gate, and came upon the lawn of Island Hall.

On the lawn stood an old gentleman and a child. The child's face was turned to the newcomers, and with a joyful little screech she rushed past the old gentleman, and precipitated herself upon the younger of the brothers, and being lifted by him, hugged and kissed him most outrageously. Her caresses having been returned, the young lady struggled to get down to the lawn again, and being landed, danced round the young fellow like a

fairy, clapping her hands and laughing. This young lady was some five years of age. Her sunny little face was brimming over with laughter and as full of saucy humour as a face could be. The dimpled little hands hovered here and there restless and light as falling snow-flakes; and what with her golden hair and her rapid childish motion, she played ronnd the object of her welcome like a very sunbeam. Pausing before him with clasped hands and an expression of sudden gravity, she made an announcement:—"Oh Franty, I've tum home."

"Now," said Franty, leaning back on his walking stick and smiling at her lazily, "I should never have guessed that."

The little damsel, susceptible to satire, explained with dignity, "I've tum home for dood."

"What!" asked Frank, "not going back to aunty any more?"

"No," said the little damsel very gravely; "I sa'n't go back to aunty's. But," she added, with such a flash of head, hands, feet, and body as only feminine childhood can accomplish, "aunty's tummin' here."

"Hillo!" Frank exclaimed. "That's news.—Is that a fact, father?"

"Yes," says the old gentleman, in a languid and even rather lackadaisical voice; "she's here now and has made up her mind to stay with us."

"Ah!" said Frank, and walked across the lawn and into the house.

"It's rather a good thing," said the old gentleman, with a voice so querulous that he seemed to be complaining of a very bad thing, "that Frank's not at home so much now as he used to be. Poor Bertha and he don't get along well together. But as for you, Will," he went on in the same qnerulous complaining voice, "you are as sober-sided an old fellow as myself, and we must do our best to bear with her crotchets, poor thing, and to make her as happy as we can."

"Who's poor thing?" inquired the young lady.

The old gentleman laughed and patted her shining head.

"What sharp ears these little people have, Will."

His son smiled in answer; and the little damsel at the sight of his smiling face, clapped her hands and laughed aloud.

Frank emerged from the house, and took the child on his shoulder, and danced with her round the lawn.

"He's a good-hearted fellow," said the father in his querulous voice; "I wish he would be a little steadier."

"I think he will be," answered Will. "We have had a very serious talk this afternoon, and he tells me he has quite made up his mind for hard work and quiet living."

The old gentleman smiled wrily and answered, "I am very glad to hear it, Will, very glad. They tell me up there, you know, that he is extremely clever. I am no judge of art; but people who do know something about pictures, tell me he is certain to rise."

Mr. Fairholt made this statement with the voice and manner of a man who complains weakly of the meanness of a dishonourable friend.

"I was up at the Academy on the fifth of last month," Will answered. "As I was going in I met Spinks, and he carted me off to Frank's picture in a most triumphant way, telling me it was one of the cleverest things of the year and safe to sell."

"It hasn't sold?" asked his father.

"I think not," Will responded. Then across the lawn: "Frank! Has that picture of yours at the Academy sold?"

"No," says Frank, pausing in his dance. "But there's a noble swell after it. He's working through his agent, a fellow who always buys for him. He wants it for one-fifty, and I've priced it at two hundred. There are a lot of mean dogs who won't buy through the Secretary, but pester the painter as though he were a retail tradesman. The picture's worth the money, and I sha'n't let it go for less. But my noble swell is an awfully tight-fisted ruffian, and I am afraid I shall lose him."

Mr. Fairholt stood smiling wrily in the sun-

shine, and rubbing his hands together discontentedly, as though he had a fretful little quarrel with them."

"Don't take less than you think it worth," he said. "But two hundred pounds is a good deal of money to pay for a picture."

"Why, bless your soul," returned Frank, "there are fellows who can get a thousand by slashing over a square yard of canvas with a brush like a broom. And I have put a good honest six months' work into that picture."

Will laughed rather mischievously, and asked, "Do you count the six weeks' flirtation at Brighton in that good honest six months' work, old fellow?"

Frank grinned responsive: "Why not? A man must keep up the artistic fervour somehow. —Mustn't he, Polly?"

Polly, seated on his shoulder and listening gravely to the conversation, laughed on being thus appealed to, and the dance began again. The old man, after looking on for a time, went into the house, and Will lit a cigar. The scent of a brown-paper fusee reaching Frank's nostrils, he suspended the dance.

"There, Polly! That's enough. Now run away and kiss Aunt Bertha."

"What for?" asked Polly.

"You mercenary little creature! For love!"

Polly made one rose-leaf of her lips, and shook her head.

"Then for sixpence," said Frank, taking the coin from his pocket.

Polly's countenance relaxed. She nodded, and having secured the coin, started off at a run; but paused in the doorway, and gave warning with a triumphant laugh: "I shall tum back again."

"Give me a weed, old fellow," said Frank.

Will produced his case; and Frank, having carefully selected his cigar and lighted it, tilted his hat, and said, whilst his gloved hand strayed amongst his curls, "Will, if you can accept this bill to-night, I will drive over to Hetherton first thing in the morning, put it in at the bank, take train up to town, pay this astounding villain immediately, and get back to-morrow evening."

"That's impossible," Will responds. "You couldn't leave Hetherton before twelve, and the mid-day train from Hetherton reaches town at four-forty. I'll accept the bill all the same. How long do you purpose staying here?"

"I want to make a week of it," Frank answered. "The fact is," he continued, throwing his hat on one side and straightening himself with a slight swagger, "I want to see something more of Maud, and I want her to see something more of me. And now that the murder's out, I don't mind telling you, Will, that what I think and feel about her has done more to tame me than even this confounded thing of Tasker's."

There was a pained look in Will's face as he

turned away, and his voice shook a little as he said, "I hadn't fancied that you cared for her at all, Frank."

"Well, one doesn't like to go about making a row over these things before they are tolerably certain," returned Frank, dragging softly at his black moustache and smiling.

Will surveyed his cigar, and knocked off the ash with the tip of his forefinger. Then he whistled a bar or two from *Semiramide*. "Do you mean to say that *you* are tolerably certain?"

"Yes," said Frank, setting his feet apart, and throwing his walking-stick across his shoulders, so that he took an end in each hand. "I'm not a vain man; but I think I could make any woman fall in love with me, provided always that she had no prior engagement—no 'priory 'tachment,' as that fellow says in the *Pickwick Papers*. The fact is, you know, that a fellow's only got to be not downright ugly and not downright stupid, and he can marry any woman for the pleasure of making love to her." Therewith the modest and ingenuous youth passed his hand caressingly through his curls, smoothed his moustache, and proceeded, his voice being pleasantly muffled by his cigar: "I'm not talking of those bred-and-born flirts one meets in town. I'm talking of women who are worth marrying. Now you know, with such a woman, if her heart's free, you have only to care about her, and to tell her so—"

"And she drops into your mouth like an over-ripe plum. Eh?"

"Exactly."

"I'm not of your opinion, Frank. I think a woman who is worth marrying is won in rather a different fashion."

Frank looked down with a glance of good-humoured and amused compassion.

Will, with his straw-hat pulled over his eyes, was very closely examining his cigar when he asked, "Have you any especial reason to think as you do about Maud?"

"Ye-es. I feel pretty safe. I feel sure she likes me, and I'm going to make a dash for it this evening. I'll either make a spoon or spoil a horn. I have to dine there, and it's time I dressed and was off. Won't you wish me luck, old fellow?"

Will, with a not over-successful attempt at a laugh, responded, "I'll wish you a little more humility and a little more knowledge of women."

Frank patted him on the shoulder, patronlike: "All right, my venerable wiseacre. I shall have news for you when I come back. Do you mind telling Jack to get the dog-cart ready? Thanks." With that the modest and ingenuous disappeared with a light and airy step.

Having fulfilled his commission, Will sat down on a garden-seat and smoked for a while.

"What's to be done now?" he asked himself. "Ought I to stand on one side and let him win?

Does it matter to him as much as it matters to me? I don't know what spoiling my life might mean, but I can guess one thing about Frank. If he cares for Maud as much as I do, and doesn't get her, he'll go to the bad altogether. I wonder whether it's because he feels more intensely, or because he never controls his feelings? I can't make up my mind about anything yet, I must wait and see—I must wait and see."

He arose and strolled in a melancholy humour back to the bridge, where he dropped pebbles into the river, and was startled from a dismal day-dream by the passage of Frank in the dog-cart, with the groom beside him.

"Ta-ta," shouted Frank. "Five to one, I win!"

Will shook his head in answer. The dogcart turned a corner of the lane. The sound of the wheels died away, and Will went on dropping pebbles in the stream, and thinking—thinking—thinking—whilst resolve grew stronger and his heart grew fainter every moment.

At last he said, "Why should I waste my heart by dropping them one by one? Let the lot go." With that he threw a handful of pebbles into the stream and walked, a little moodily, home.

CHAPTER III.

HISTORY.

Costly and cumbrous vulgarities choked these gilded salons.

THE Hartleys were new people, and were not yet entitled to call themselves "county". No man knew exactly how rich old Hartley was, though he passed as a sort of Crœsus. But his mansion was new even to rawness. His coat of arms was original even to absurdity. The whole style of the man was too brassy, too obtrusive, too florid, too everything but gentlemanly. He was an old man and an ugly and a vulgar, and his dress was loud and ostentatious. He had bought a huge estate down there, and had christened it Hartley Park. He had built unto himself a gorgeous mansion, and had christened it Hartley Hall. He had provided himself with a stud of horses, the like of which the county could not show. His servants were attired in an overwhelming livery. His greenhouses rivalled my Lord Chesterwood's. He kept open house, or something very like it, the whole year through; and he gave on his first coming numerous entertainments for the benefit of the county people, from which the county people coldly stayed away. The rooms of Hartley Hall were more plenteously furnished with buhl and ormolu than a west-end upholsterer's warehouse. Costly and cumbrous

vulgarities positively choked these gilded salons. Pictures from the hands of the first modern artists —for art was here as new as everything else— graced the wall in such profusion as almost to hide the very papering. Everything was on a scale of barbaric and unregulated splendour.

Benjamin Hartley of Hartley Hall had two sons. One was still at Cambridge, and the other was an extravagant Lieutenant in the Fourteenth Plungers. That gallant regiment lay just then at Cahir, and County Tipperary knew Lieutenant Hartley well. Lieutenant Hartley of Hartley Hall, possessor of unlimited cash and unlimited credit, and heir-expectant to a colossal fortune, was well enough received among the county people here; and Horace St. John Hartley of Jesus found little difficulty in the gratification of his desire for the companionship of the noblest swells just then known to Cambridge. For both the Lieutenant and the student had gotten that air of age their father lacked. Their father would be new to the end of his days, and would continue new if he could live to be as old as Methuselah; but both the lads had a rare power of adaptability. In the days when their father sent them to Eton, that famous school was a better training-ground for gentlemen than it is at present. There were fewer of the sons of the newly-rich within its walls, and the young fellows were not long in acquiring the airs of *ton*. Not unnaturally, perhaps, they despised their father,

and were a good deal ashamed of him and of his newness. They were rarely seen at home except at unavoidable seasons; and when forced to meet the author of their being and the contriver of their fortunes, they bore themselves with a distant hauteur in which the old man rejoiced.

"For"—so he sometimes mused—and so in the genial after-dinner hour would sometimes openly declare— "I ain't a gentleman, and I know it; buth both Arthur an' Horace are gettin' to be regular tip-top swells. It a'n't natural as they should look with a lot o' respect on me. I should despise 'em if they did. But I don't stand no nonsense, mind you. They do as I tell 'em; I take care o' that. I don't know as Solomon was so remarkable wise after all. He says he don't know whether a wise man or a fool is to come after him and collar his coppers. Well, *I* do. I've got two as sharp lads as you'll find anywhere, with a good eye to the main-chance, both of 'em; and a regular swell style about both of 'em as would ha' made my hair stand on hend to look at twenty year ago. And when I've dropped off, the lads 'll come in and put things straight. These county folks, with their high-strung notions, won't cut *them*, I bet. No, no. It's different with me. I've been in coal and iron and taller, and cotton and stocks and shippin', and pretty nigh everythin'. They call that sort of thing low, down here. And so it is low. But it's a bit hard lines on a fellow

too. The man as does the work and gets the money can't enjoy it. At least he can't enjoy it thorough. But them as comes after him, them as he's scraped for and worked for, and toiled for and moiled for, they'll be able to come in with their Heton lingo and their eye-glasses, and run the rig with any of 'em. And as for coin, they'll go beyond 'em. In point o' coin, I ain't far off shakin' hands with old Coutts, and that's a fact. Big houses ain't always the warmest, and I don't know as if I was to go and tick off thousand for thousand along with him, as I mightn't have something to spare after all."

So the old heathen communed with himself and with divers of his chosen. He had his good points. Like many men who have striven after money all their lives and have denied themselves greatly, he was, now that his fortune had grown secure, lavishly generous. His good-nature was genuine. His pretty niece had not even to wheedle in order to find liberal comforts for her favourite poor. The clergyman of the parish never appealed to him in vain. "No; hang it! Mister;" said old Hartley, when the parson first called on him and let loose upon him the simple annals of the poor of those parts— "No; hang it! Mister; I won't have that in *my* neighbourhood. But I'm not agoing to keep the thunderin' village either. Look here," continued Benjamin with a wink, "tell the beggars as I'm a hard-fisted dog as parts with his money

like blood. Just keep up that bit o' gammon between ourselves, will you? But you can exercise your influence, you know, an' grind a fi-pun' note out of me once in a way; don't you see?" The cleric, departing, gave it forth that Mr. Hartley was one who did good by stealth and blushed to find it fame; but when this statement got back to Benjamin's ears, he grinned satirically, and surmised that the parson was not a man of business. "It's a fine thing to have a repitation for hardness," said the old gentleman. "It saves a deal o' trouble."

How came Benjamin Hartley with such a niece as Maud? How, in the name of all that is wonderful, came such a dainty flower to grow from such a rough and gnarled old stock? For rough and gnarled the stock must surely have been which produced Benjamin Hartley, Esquire. But years before this story opens, Benjamin's sister married —very high in life, as people who knew her then fancied, securing no less a person than the young Dissenting minister of the Black Country village she dwelt in. She was a woman of much innate refinement; and her husband—spite of the fact that he was a Dissenting parson—was a scholar and a gentleman. He was dolefully poor, and died young. His wife followed his wise example early, and left this world for a better. Thus their one child was left to the mercies of Providence, and said Uncle Benjamin, "Providence turned up trumps in the shape o' me."

There was another sister who married later and far higher. She married a man whose affairs were flourishing, and who was so very far above the family, that he looked down upon it with a bitter disdain, and never, after his marriage, by a word acknowledged it. His name was Campbell, and he was a wealthy ironmaster. Somehow or other, he came to grief, and died utterly penniless, leaving behind him one son, aged three years. Old Hartley was ignorant of this child's existence. Had it been otherwise, he would have given him a home with Maud; for he was not a man who bore malice, and had long since forgiven and forgotten John Campbell's disdain, and had never lost his affection for John Campbell's wife. But the years had come between them, and he knew nothing of their fall from prosperity or of their death.

Just now—on this especial summer evening—Mr. Hartley stood in his drawing-room in expectation of Frank's arrival. The Fairholts were the only county people who might be at all considered caught. Old Hartley knew well enough that they cared very little for him or his house, or even his money. He recognised the magnet which drew the two young fellows to Hartley Hall, and watched their attentions to Maud with much complacency. "There's Mr. William"—so he thought over matters—"has got a very pretty little estate. I know it's entailed, and he can have Maud if he wants her. But I'm rather in favour o' the young un. He'll

have next to nothin'; but I like him. He's a fine handsome chap, with lots o' spirit and fun in him, an' there's no takin' him for anything but a swell, anywhere. I've got two lads o' my own to look after, and they can't expect to get much along with her; but I shall hand her a check for a quiet little ten thousand on her wedding-day, and they can set up on *that*, anyhow, even if the young un gets her. Let the gell please herself—that's how I look at it."

"Maud!" said the old man aloud, waking from his reverie. "Ain't it time young Fairholt was here?"

At this moment young Fairholt was ushered in, and met with a loud and vulgar welcome.

"Aha! How d'ye do? Thought you wasn't comin'. Glad to see you, Mr. Fairholt. And how's the Hisland? And how's hall at the 'All?".

"Everybody is well, thank you," Frank answers; but he is already turning to shake hands with Maud. That young lady blushes a little as she comes to meet him, but receives him with great cordiality. A gorgeous menial announces dinner, and there are half-a-dozen other gorgeous menials distributed over the desert of Turkey carpet in the dining room. Warm as the weather is, there is an aspect of arctic coldness about this huge apartment, and a sense of desertion in the very look of the great table. It would seem as though a score or so of people had been invited and had not come;

and the three sit down in the Turkey carpet desert, before that table-land of snow, as in a magnificent but enforced isolation.

Will you look at Maud through her lover's eyes or through mine? For my part, I am free —in parliamentary English—to confess that I have seen prettier faces, though I have not seen many more lovable. Of what use is it to attempt to draw a portrait in words of a pretty young English-woman? How can the pen catch those gracious little turns of the head—those marvellously minute modellings of cheek and nose and lips—those tender graces of the eyes—those helpless yet fearless and endearing ways which go so far to make the charm of sweet eighteen? I can tell you that Maud is tall and slim and graceful. I can tell you that she has brown hair and hazel eyes. "But girls with hair and eyes are everywhere." I can tell you that her complexion is most daintly clear and sweet, and that her mouth is most eminently kissable. I could catalogue a score more of her graces; but what would this suffice you? My brother of the brush goes beyond me in this matter altogether, and Frank in twenty minutes could present you with a random smutch in colour which would tell you more about her in this respect than Dickens himself could have told you in a twelvemonth.

Dinner is not a matter of much account to female eighteen and male four-and twenty when they chance to be at the same table and are in

love with each other. Old Hartley's presence troubled the young people little, for he said nothing he could avoid saying, and seemed buried in his own fancies. A tell-tale shot was fired across the table now and again from Frank to Maud, and from Maud to Frank, and they both grew a little shy.

Dinner being over, the millionaire broke silence: "We'll take our wine up-stairs, if you please, Mr. Fairholt. The ladies is very near a fiction in this here instance."

So Maud's rising was the signal for host and visitor to follow. Maud's taste had evidently been busy about the room they now entered. There was no barbarism of splendour here. Everything was quiet, refined and graceful. The windows of the room looked out on the park. A sweet prospect. The evening was still young. The blue of the sky was a little more tender, the gleam of the sunlight a little mellower on the park trees and the park landscape and the pleasant river.

"For my part," said the retired capitalist, arranging himself comfortably in an arm-chair, "I don't take wine after dinner. I'm contented with a drop o' brandy an' a bit of ice. But there's anything you like here. Try that there sherry. My Lord Chesterwood himself can't beat that, I'll bet. Melted gold, it looks like, don't it? And by Jove! sir, that's pretty well what it amounts to. Now I shall just take my nip, and then I shall

take my nap, and leave Maud to take care of you, sir. I can't do without my snooze after dinner."

The old gentleman's appetite had been diminished by no such cause as that which had spoiled the dinner of his young companions. He had well eaten and drunken, and his nap came readily. A bassoon-like note again and again repeated, monotonous but mellow, accompanied and proclaimed his slumbers, and Maud and Frank were left to their own devices.

"Would you—" Frank began, and stopped there.

"Would I—" said Maud, hinting a continuation.

"I wanted to suggest a stroll to the gardens. It's dreadfully hot here."

"Shall I rouse Mr. Hartley?" Maud asked.

"Nonsense, Maud! Do you care to walk? It looks so peaceful and calm outside that it seems almost a sin to stay indoors."

"It does indeed," Maud answered, and for a moment disappeared. When she returned, she had thrown over her head a something of dark lace, the edges whereof fell to her waist—the merest pretence of preparation for out-of-doors. She and Frank were on very close and confidential terms of friendship, and were perhaps nervously inclined to parade this to themselves, because they both knew very well that there was something more than friendship behind its pleasant mask. They

chose a shady walk, which led through well-laid gardens to the Park. At the Park gate they stopped. The silence had grown a ltttle embarrassing, for neither had spoken since they left the house.

Frank broke the bonds of quiet with an effort. "I go back to town in a day or two."

"Indeed!" Maud said. "So soon?"

"Yes. It goes sorely against the grain; but I have some matters of importance to see to, and I must get back almost at once."

"It is too bad, Frank. You are more than half pledged for the picnic on the first. You are a very faithless and inconsiderate person."

"If you are going to scold, Maud, I must smoke. I can endure the ills of life with greater philosophy when behind a cigar than under any other circumstances. Are you provided?"

"Yes, sir, I am provided," responded Maud, producing a cigar-case. "Knowing that we could not possibly spend five minutes together without quarrelling, and knowing that you can never quarrel with decent politeness unless you smoke, I have stolen uncle's case."

"You are a very accommodating antagonist," Frank answered, accepting the proffered cigar. He did not light it at once, but leaned with his elbows on the gate, and looked thoughtfully across the Park.

"Well, sir," said Maud, with a pretty air of

harmless impudence. "Get your battery in order. The enemy advances in full force."

"No," returned Frank, looking round upon her; "I shall not fall back upon my reserves until my present forces are expended. I shall withhold my fire."

"Very good," Maud answered gaily. "The enemy's advance-guard declares itself. Why were you so stupidly silent during dinner?"

"I plead guilty to the silence, but deny the stupidity."

"You change ground already, sir, and try to escape from the battle-field to the law-court. But I am willing to encounter you there. On what ground do you deny the stupidity?"

"On the ground that I was mentally engaged in a wise admiration."

"A wise admiration? The admiration of your own face and figure in the glass behind me? I caught you twice."

"I am grateful for the complaisance which pronounces such an admiration wise."

"And I," returned Maud, "am astonished at the vanity which accepts so absurdly false a compliment."

"I return to the old simile," Frank replied. "My outposts fall back for the protection of the main body, and the artillery prepares for action. Will my courteous enemy assist me?"

"Your courteous enemy has stolen a box of vestas, and now proffers them."

"My courteous enemy is thanked for her courtesy. But now a truce to truces. There goes the first puff from the artillery. The action begins in earnest, and the forces of the Frank make reprisals. Why were *you* so stupidly silent during dinner?"

"The enemy grows insolent."

"Maud!"

"Sir!"

"Let us be serious."

"I am more than serious. Come sir. For

"Front to front the bannered hosts combine,
Halt ere they close, and form the dreadful line."

"Oh, hang Tom Campbell on his dreadful line! Maud, let me speak. I'm going back to town almost directly, and I have something I must say to-night. I shall not see you again for heaven alone knows how long." He throws his cigar over the gate, and takes both her hands in his: "Maud, I love you!"

The saucy eyes were lowered. Maud made no answer. Frank relinquished one hand and stole an arm round her waist. She attempted no repulse. He kissed her, and her head dropped down upon his shoulder. So they stood for a while.

I can scarcely find the heart, in pursuance of

my function as story-teller, to take them from each other's arms. They will never be so happy as they are at this blessed moment, any more. There was something which welled up in Frank's heart and surprised him. An infinite protecting tenderness. An emotion at once vast and vague; comprising within it all possible loves; of fatherhood and brotherhood and childhood. He thought of his own follies and his own unworthiness, and his eyes grew a little dim. There was a sharp compunction in his breast as he laid a hand on each cheek and gently forced back the blushing face until the shy eyes were raised to his and dropped again, and the shy sweet face was nestled at his heart.

"Look here, Maud!" said Frank very earnestly. "You don't know what a pack of imperfections you have taken hold of. I've been an idle, careless, butterfly sort of fellow. I have never been in earnest in my whole life about anything but you; and I want to make confession; and I want love to absolve me; and I want to promise that I'll be a thousand times more manly in life than I have ever been before. I want to promise this; and I want to have it on my mind always that than I have promised. And when I think of you, darling—and that will be always—I shall think of this confession and this promise. And just to make the promise all the more sacred, give me your hands, dear. Tell me for the first time that you care for me."

And so, by love, and love's confession, Frank Fairholt vowed himself to manhood.

The lovers lingered in the garden. The light grew softer and fainter. Through a long vista in the Park they could see the pale summer moon low on the horizon. It was a time and a place of peace, and joy had no tumult now. They talked—as happy lovers will—of the future. They filled it with bright visions of home and of homely joys. Was there any sorrow in the sky at all? None. There was no cloud so large as a man's hand.

But Time will not stay his course, even for happy lovers. Parting came at last. A pleasant parting. Good-bye and good-bye often repeated. A tender warfare in which each was resolved to bless the other last. Good-bye. Good-bye.

Was there any sorrow in the sky? Was there a cloud so large as a man's hand? And yet these happy lovers met no more.

CHAPTER VI.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY.

Suddenly, at the station door, the real terror came from behind me.

ALL day I was haunted by the memory of the face. It moulded itself so severely that afternoon and so terribly in the night which followed, that

to this very day I remember it more clearly than I remember any other countenance I ever saw. A curious sensation accompanied me in my spell-bound memories. It had happened that at the moment when the stranger startled me at the edge of the clay mine, I had got my floating faculties into full swing, and was hovering round a certain slaty ledge in fancy. And so my sense of the face was something like that which a small bird might have of a falcon. Always—that afternoon—I was hovering harmless in mid-air, and always the figure of the stranger seemed to be pouncing down upon me. Perhaps it was less the figure than the face. The figure was blurred and dim even then; but every line and tint of the face was cruelly clear.

That afternoon, Sally took me to the neighbouring town, and to a huge emporium of ready-made clothing there. In a retiring-room of that establishment I was wedged into a suit of clothes, in which I reminded myself vaguely of a rhinoceros, whose pictured semblance I had somewhere seen. A great many other purchases were made, and for Sally the day was a busy one. It lay somehow upon my childish conscience that I had allowed one of my school-fellows to be accused of a crime he had not committed; but I was so perfectly assured that Sally would not in the least understand me if I tried to tell her what had really happened, that I forbore from saying any-

thing at all about the stranger. Possibly he was with me all the more on account of the very secrecy in which I felt myself compelled to harbour him. At least I know that his face, in some inexplicable way, mingles for me now with the rolling noises of a great town's traffic; with the first glimmer of the gas-lamps in a crowded street; with the rattle of a railway journey; with a hundred of the new experiences of that afternoon, which have since renewed themselves countless times, as such experience will.

The face identified itself then, and remains identified in memory now, with the flickering of the fire; with the quiet of the room; with the voices and the footsteps of casual passers-by outside; with the winding stairway; with the sparsely furnished bedroom; with the glimmer of the departing light; with the darkness and the silence which ensued. It identified itself also with a certain quaint doggerel petition, which is all I remember of the evening devotions of my childhood, and which ran thus:—

"Four corners to my bed;
Four angels at my head!
Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John,
Bless the bed that I lie on!"

I never think of this ridiculous petition now without associating it with that face. If I call back the old childish feelings, as I am fond of

doing, when I lie awake on a dark night, and hear the rain pattering against the window, and the wind moaning outside, I recall that face. It has grown indeed to be a part of the wind and rain and darkness, as of everything else to me. As I can see it now, I can translate it. Let me call it back. I can read in it nothing but blind fear and horror and despair. And if it touches me so now, is it a thing to be wondered at that it haunted me so many years back, like an evil ghost? Its most terrible peculiarity was, perhaps, that though I was always conscious of its presence, and though I could positively perceive its lines there was about it a singular feeling that the light or the darkness upon which it stood acted in some way as a mirror, and gave me its reflection, whilst the real face was close behind me. This dreadful fancy grew so strong that night, that though I buried my head beneath the bedclothes and shrank close to the wall against which the bed was placed, I found myself compelled by sheer terror to lie upon my back and face the phantom so. But even then it was only a *simulacrum* that I faced. The real terror was underneath the bed below me. And yet the face was there—clearly outlined, firmly modelled, with its haggard eyes, its blur of unshaven beard on cheek and chin, its drawn lips and gleaming teeth.

Children, I think, are gifted with a very singular heroism in regard to terrors of this kind.

I know that I could not bear now in darkness and in solitude what I suffered then. When I fell asleep the face was with me. When I awoke it was with me still. When, by Sally's aid, I had rewedged myself into my unaccustomed garments, and stood cumbrously in the middle of the kitchen, awaiting the advent of yesterday's visitor, the face was there. When the stately lady came in a cab to the door, and whilst she talked with Sally and with that good creature's mother, and with me, the face was still behind me, and its ghostly reflection was still suspended in the air before me. When we were all three inside the cab and I was seated on the stately lady's knee, the shadow dodged behind the cabman's figure, and waited for me at the station door. And suddenly—and bearing what a horror, words are powerless to say—at the station door, the real terror came from behind me. The stranger of yesterday afternoon! I knew him directly, though he was much changed. He was no longer well dressed, but was attired in a suit of moleskin, and a pair of clay-soiled boots, and an old battered wide-awake hat, and a dirty flannel shirt. There was one thing which impressed me about this second bodily sight of the stranger's face. Not only did I recognise the face, but the face recognised me. Now the phantom face, though it had looked upon me continually, had no gleam of recognition in it; and it was

partly by this, I fancy, that I distinguished between the real and the false.

I had not up to this time been able to realise in any measure the relationship between the stately lady and myself. If she had been younger, my knowledge of fiction might have come to my aid, and she might have been the Fairy Peribanou, or the Princess Balroulbadour or any of the thousand-and-one *inamorate* of *Gil Blas* or *Roderik Random*. How innocent the childish fancy is! How incomplete and how complete at once! The better part of a book read in childhood is a legacy left by the child to the man. It is only the man who can find the dross of it and the folly of it, and can incorporate that dross and folly—not the child.

But she had talked to me in such a kindly and motherly way, and her face was so eminently lovable and gracious, that I had already overcome my first shyness, and with that impulsive certainty which is the best dowry of the childish heart, had already thrown myself, quite securely, upon her love and protection. And so it was something of an added wonder to notice that the eyes of yesterday's stranger, when they left mine, and rested for a moment on her face should suddenly assume a double horror, and that the stranger, turning, should run, with one sharp cry, full tilt along the street as fast as his legs could carry him. At the cry, everybody in the station-yard turned; but in a

moment the flying figure was lost to sight, and was forgotten by all but me.

We all three rode together; Sally sitting stiffly upright and rigidly unobservant in one corner of the carriage, and I seated for a considerable part of the journey in the lady's lap. I cannot remember that up to this time I had known any of those playful endearments which mean so much to children. I have no memory whatsoever of my parents; and Sally, though I can never underprize her affection, had not many of Love's outer graces. Personally, she was of a broad and bony pattern, and had more angles on her than I have seen upon any other human structure. She was very hard and red in face and hands and arms; and had a curious roughness on her skin, as though she were in the habit of drying herself with a file whenever she was washing herself. She was a tearful creature too, and when she felt any especial affection for me, would take me on her lap ond would put those rough red arms about me, and cry over me for half-an-hour together. So that, upon the whole, I am afraid I rather evaded and than courted any demonstration of her love. But the lady, as we rode together, pointed out this, that, and the other object on the way which she thought might interest my childish fancy; and had, for all her stateliness, a thousand of those endearing and graceful ways which make a woman the proper guide and companion of

childhood. And thus it came about that the phantom face was destined to represent and to be associated with one other experience; and thus, even now—so firmly do these childish memories cling—that face is mixed with my first experience of the pleasantries of affection, and even now—so firmly does the childish memory cling—the pleased laugh of a child brings back that sombre phantom to my mind.

There was yet another association the face took during that journey, which I have not yet forgotten. Sally, inspired, I suppose, by a sense of the new character of our relations, addressed me whenever she spoke as Master Campbell, and alluded to me always in the same distant phrase. There was to my young spirit something so forlorn and foreign in the sound, that after it had been repeated once or twice I lay down, and under pretence of going to sleep, covered up my head and had a cry about it. But Sally—bless her kindly heart!—saw it all, and when my aunt had left the carriage in pursuit of refreshments at a great station at which the train rested, and took its own refreshment in the shape of coke and water, the faithful creature lifted me from the corner in which I lay, and said, "There; I won't do it again, deary. Wipe your eyes. Here's your aunt comin'. There; run and look out o' window. It shall be Johnny when we're by wereselves."

Somewhat comforted by this assurance, I stood

at the carriage-window and looked at the landscape until I made myself believe that we were standing still; whilst the near country waltzed quickly by us to a lively tune, and the distant country paced slowly on to a sad one. Both the sad tune and the lively one were made by the rolling and rattling of the wheels, and the sad tune came in with a single note at the end of every second bar of the lively tune. I amused myself by keeping them distinct, and by making both the near and distant country keep time to their rhythmic throb. The face kept time also, and appeared and vanished as the engine panted and the wheels rolled the ceaseless tune I gave them. Then I invented a new joy which was almost equal to that of the clay-mine. I closed my eyes until I found myself undetermined for a moment as to the direction in which the train was going, and by an effort of will, reversed its motion. When the delusion was complete, I opened my eyes, and the delicious delirious shock with which the panting monster of an engine suddenly reversed himself, and bore me onward, instead of bearing me backward, was a thing not to be described.

I cannot insist too much upon the fact of that ever present face. It was not only there, but it knit itself into everything I did and saw and thought and heard, and became part and parcel of them all. And yet I was full of eager

childish curiosities throughout the whole journey, and greeted everything with that silent and enjoying wonder which is the child's prerogative.

At a station at which a red-whiskered and sanguine-complexioned porter bawled out 'Hetherton,' we alighted, and a man on the platform touched his hat to my aunt. He wore a queer black star at the side of his hat, and was dressed in a drab livery. He was the first liveried servant I had seen. I took him for some tremendous functionary, and his evident respect for my aunt made her almost awful in my eyes. What my aunt said to this man I did not catch, but I heard him answer, "No, ma'am. Mr. Fairholt's coming down by the next train from town, ma'am, and I'm here to meet him."

"Very good," said my aunt, and so left the platform, and walked before us through the station and stepped into a cab. She said nothing to the cabman; but he went into the station and brought back with him our luggage, which my aunt had already pointed out to a porter. When he had put the luggage on the top of the cab, he mounted, and drove us away without a word of instruction; from which I argued that my aunt was well known there. The road ran for some distance between fields; some were newly ploughed, and in others the stubble was still standing. The hedges were almost bare of leaves, and the roads were wet with recent rains. The skies were grey, the clouds

hung low; and the wind tossed and tousled the boughs as if it had a restless spite against them. For a time the road ran past a broad turbid river, and then through lanes again, until we crossed a wooden bridge, passed through a wooden gate, which the cabman got down to open, and went by a firmly gravelled carriage-way round the lawn in front of a large and stately house of red brick. This house was quite invisible, by reason of the trees which thronged about it, until we came upon the carriage-drive, and was half hidden, even then, by a thick and clustering growth of ivy.

The cabman having been dismissed, I was taken by my aunt into a room on the ground floor. I had never until that day consciously even dreamed of such an apartment. It seemed to me unspeakably magnificent. It had pictures and a piano, and a rich carpet, and a marble mantel-piece, and a great mirror, and a number of articles of furniture of which I knew neither the uses nor the names. Curiously enough, in the midst of all its strangeness, I was as perfectly certain that I had seen it before as I was that I was there. There was a bright fire burning in the grate; and notwithstanding what seemed to me the grandeur of the room, it looked very homelike and comfortable. The whole of one wall was lined with books.

"You must stay here for a little while," my aunt said, as she kissed me and smoothed my hair. "Can you read?"

I answered shyly "Yes."

"Can you?" she said. "Let me hear you," and took up a book from the table.

It chanced to be a volume of Coleridge's poems, and opened naturally at the *Ancient Mariner*. I began,

> "It is an ancient mariner,
> And he stoppeth one of three."

She laughed a little, partly in surprise, and partly, I fancy, at my uncouth accent, and said, "Oh, yes. That will do nicely. You can go on reading, if you like.—This book," she said, tapping a volume with her finger, "is full of pictures. You may look at it."

But I had no appetite for the pictures just then, and was eager to know more of the *Ancient Mariner*, and I so buried myself in the story, and so mixed my ghost up with it all, that, with the weirdness of the poet's fancy, and the terror of my own, I grew frightened. How long my aunt had left me alone, I cannot say; but I had just come to the end of the Ancient Mariner's story, when the door opened, and my ghost came in. At least I thought so for a moment, though in another moment I saw I was mistaken. It was a grey-headed old gentleman, with a peevish face. In the first flush of surprise and fear I had risen to my feet, and stood with the book folded tightly in my arms.

The old gentleman advanced towards me, and, putting a hand on each knee, bent down to look at me, and asked me, in a peevish voice, "Well, my little man, and who are you?"

It came across me suddenly that my aunt was an embodied deception, who had inveigled me away from Sally, and had left me here as a prey to the grey-headed old gentleman. I was very frightened, and nervous, and I began to cry.

"Oh dear," said the old gentleman, with face and voice more peevish than before, "I can't have this—I can't have this." He struck a gong which stood upon the table, an action which filled me with the direst forebodings. The summons, however, produced nothing more dreadful than a pink-cheeked damsel in cotton print, who had received us when we arrived.

"Who is— Who is—" So the old gentleman began in a nervous, fretful, irritable way. "Who is—" He seemed to give up the idea of indicating me verbally as an impossibility, and threw a hand towards me instead.

"I don't know, sir," said the girl. "He came with Mrs. Campbell, half-an-hour ago."

"Where is she?" asked the old gentleman in the same irritable way.

I heard the rustle of a dress outside, the damsel answered, "Here, sir;" and my aunt appeared.

"Good-day, Robert," she said.

The girl retired; and the old gentleman, indicating me again by a wave of the hand, asked, "Who is this?"

My aunt settled herself in an arm-chair, arranged her dress, folded her hands, dropped her head back negligently, and responded, "A protégé of mine."

The old gentleman gave a feeble and a peevish start.

"Now, Robert," said me aunt, with a decision and certainty which seemed natural to her, "we will not discuss that question just at present. He ought to have been here— Let us say, for example," she said, arresting herself suddenly, and casting a glance at me, "X. has been grossly neglected by A., whose duty it was to provide for him, and who knew perfectly well of his whereabouts. B. discovers A.'s neglected duty, and brings A. face to face with his responsibilities." Then with a change of tone and another glance at me, she continued, "This is your nephew, Robert—poor John Campbell's child."

"Dear me, Bertha," said the old gentleman, rubbing one hand fretfully with the other, "ties of blood *are* ties of blood—"

"That's a proposition I don't in the least dispute," my aunt intercepted. "I am glad to find that you admit it."

"But I can't go about the country searching out all the paupers who happen to be within

fifty degrees of me by marriage. Bless my soul!" said the old gentleman with anything but a voice of benediction, "it's impossible."

"If John Campbell," said my aunt, with the same calm decision of tone, had said, 'Impossible!' when Robert Fairholt wished to borrow ten thousand pounds once on a time—" She did not close the sentence, but waited as if watching its effect. The old gentleman walked up and down the room, taking three or four steps each way, and then pulling himself up with a jerk. There was an air of helpless exasperation about him, and he harried his grey hair peevishly with his hands.

"I suppose you will have your way, Bertha, since you have brought him here—"

"Since," said my aunt, intercepting him again —"Since X. has been discovered by B., A. is left without option. Don't worry yourself over so simple a question, Robert."

The old gentleman walked jerkily up and down the room again. It seemed to me as though every time he started, he had made up his mind to go for something in a great hurry, and that he pulled himself up less because he came to the wall, than because of a spiteful contradiction within himself of his own first purpose. After half-a-dozen turns, he suddenly abandoned this contradiction of his own design, and went out at the door. My aunt laughed in a short, triumphant way.

"Come with me, John," she said a moment afterwards, and led me to a room at the top of the house. In this room sat a little girl, a golden-haired, blue-eyed, pretty little creature, who gravely employed herself in cutting out a fantastic pattern from a sheet of brown paper with a tiny pair of scissors. To this young lady my aunt introduced me as a cousin."

"Cousin Mary, and Cousin John," said my aunt. "Now, you young people must be very fond of each other. Won't you?" she asked, kneeling down between us and putting an arm round each.

I think I should probably be less embarrassed by an introduction at this time to a lady of my own years, though the introduction were couched in precisely similar terms, than I was then; and my embarrassment, so far as I remember, arose from a feeling that it was somehow a piece of dreadful presumption in me to be there at all, listening to a suggestion, and giving countenance to it by my silence, that such a young lady in such a house could possibly accept me on terms of equality, or could under any circumstances condescend to be fond of me. I felt as though in my own person I had been guilty of this invitation of her affections, and I hung my head. When I looked up, I saw that the little girl was surveying me in a critical but not unapproving way. She confirmed my impression of her opinion by saying calmly to her aunt, "I like him," and instantly

crossing over and kissing me. "He's like Franty," she said, as if in explanation. My aunt laughed, and kissed each of us, and went away. I stood in shy silence when she had left me, and Cousin Mary went back to the fantastic pattern in brown paper.

"How old are you?" she asked, with quite an air of years and patronage.

I told her.

"What's your other name?" she asked.

I answered again as nervously as though before a queen.

"Are you clever?" she questioned further. "Do you know any tales? I shall like you if you know tales."

This emboldened me, and I said Yes; I knew a good many. She dropped the fantastic pattern and the scissors on the floor, and settled herself in her chair, cross-legged like a Turk, leaned back with closed eyes, and said with a sort of languid imperiousness, "Tell one now."

This sudden command more than renewed my first shyness, and I stood and hung my head before her, as though she had been a full-blown Sultan, and I the meanest of her subjects. She opened her eyes and said, with languid impatience, "Oh, what an awtward boy you *are*. Go on."

Thus commanded, I made an effort, and plunged desperately into my last read narrative—

the *Ancient Mariner*. I had just got so far as to state that the man who was going to the wedding was afraid to move because the old gentleman with the grey beard stared at him so, when she stopped me.

"I don't like that," she said. "Do you know about the three bears?"

I muttered a confession of my ignorance.

"Nor about Red Ridinghood?"

I knew nothing of Red Ridinghood; but I knew Bluebeard and Jack the Giant-killer, and Aladdin and Jack and the Bean-stalk.

Whether the Sultana's mind would have continued in favour of story-telling, I cannot say, for the door opened just then, and a gentleman entered the room. He nodded at my companion, and said, "Well, Polly." She nodded back at him and laughed. The gentleman regarded me with an air of good-humoured amusement for a minute or two, and I felt sure of him at once. He was many years younger than my aunt, but was strikingly like her. He was very handsome, too, and had a soft, engaging manner. I liked his kind grey eyes and candid face at once. He sat down and took me on his knee. "Well, my little man," he said, "how do you like your new home?"

I said I didn't know.

He set me down again, and laid a hand on each of my shoulders, and so held me at arm's-length, and laughed. "I must get to know this

gentleman's tailor," he said. "I wonder whether this is his normal aspect, or whether Aunt Bertha has trussed him up in this way? What a funny little figure! We must mend all this, or we shall have the villagers burning him for a Guy on the fifth. Frontal development, good; general expression, dreamy. Education, up to this time, I should say, calculated to spoil him. Wonder if the governor's seen him?" All this he said less to himself than as if addressing some invisible fourth person. He sat and looked at me for a moment longer, and then asked me, "Do you know what a frontal development is?"

"No, sir," I answered.

"Do you know what a Guy is?"

"No, sir," I responded again.

"That's all right then. Do you know what a shilling is?"

"Yes, sir."

"What would you do with it, if I gave you one?"

I told him I should give it to Sally to keep for me.

"Sally?" he said with a laugh. "That's the bony importation I saw just now, I suppose. There you are. Now, you needn't give it to Sally; you can spend it, or do what you like with it."

At that moment my aunt entered the room again. "What, Will?" she said. "You are beginning to spoil the child already?"

"I say, aunt," he said, rising, "what a spectacle the infant is! Who chose that dress?"

"It's not a very successful choice," my aunt responded. "But it will do for one of the village children. I ought to have seen to that myself, but was too busy."

"What does the governor say about it? About your bringing the child here, I mean?"

"He says very little," responded my aunt. "In fact I think he says nothing at all."

"He has seen him, I suppose?"

"Yes; he has seen him."

"That's all right then. It was a clear duty; but his ways are so methodical and settled, and anything new about the house disturbs him so, that I was rather afraid he might be annoyed."

With that they both went away, and Cousin Mary and I were once more left alone together. At her bidding, I kept shop until tea-time, and she came in at intervals and bought my whole stock on credit. The tea-board was presided over by the pink-cheeked damsel in the cotton print; and after tea, Mary and I played at keeping shop again until Aunt Bertha came, with Sally in her wake, and saw me tubbed and night-gowned, and heard me offer up my quaint evening petition. Then she took me in her arms and carried me to a tiny bedroom, with a sloping roof, and with white curtains and a dormer window. There was a fire-grate in the room, and the wood that burned

and crackled in it made a cheerful flicker on the walls and roof and on the white curtains and the bed. My aunt kissed me and laid me down, and arranged the clothes about me with a kind and gentle hand, and then sat down beside me, and sang softly some verses of a Christmas hymn about the good King Wenceslas. It was raining outside, and the trees were moaning; and as I lay there with the flicker of the firelight in my eyes, the pleasant voice, and the comfort of the room, and the noises of the wind and rain outside, and the moaning of the trees, and the charms of Cousin Mary, and the dread and terror of the stranger's face, and the weird story of the Ancient Mariner, seemed all to mingle wavingly together, as though their lights and shadows flickered with the flickering of the fire, until they rounded and were softened to a dream, and lost themselves in sleep.

CHAPTER V.

HISTORY.

Your obedient servant, Aminadab Tasker.

MR. CRISP, managing clerk of the branch of the county bank at Hetherton, sat on a sweltering summer morning in the bank's retiring-room. Mr.

Crisp had nothing particular to do, and had exhausted that day's *Times*. The weather was oppressive; and notwithstanding that the window was opened and the blind down, and that Mr. Crisp, for further ease, had discarded his coat and sat in his shirt sleeves, he perspired dreadfully. He mopped his damply gleaming baldness and his jolly face with a scented handkerchief of yellow silk, and fanned himself with the *Times* supplement, and yawned. Mr. Crisp was a mighty angler, and he yearned just then for a quiet cast in his favourite stream, and could almost fancy himself standing knee-deep in grasses, with the broad landscape dozing round about him, and the airs of the river blowing in his face. He awoke from this vision with a sense of added heat and went viciously for a blue-bottle with his ruler. The blue-bottle took refuge on the manager's gleaming baldness, and Mr. Crisp rising in a sudden heat of temper—as the quietest of men will do under this sort of aggravation—whipped the blue-bottle from his refuge, and, taking a towel from a cupboard, pursued him with deadly intent to the window. Fiery hot, perspiring, and shirt-sleeved, he flogged the blue-bottle from coigne of vantage to coigne of vantage, and chased him from stronghold unto stronghold, until, as he held himself in readiness for a final blow, whilst the blue-bottle walked impudently across a pane in the very centre of the

window, the door of the room opened, and Mr. Frank Fairholt entered.

Mr. Frank Fairholt was exasperatingly cool, and Mr. Crisp was most aggravatingly hot and flushed and untidy, and felt himself taken at a disadvantage. He regarded Frank for a moment as though he would include him in a common anathema with the blue-bottle; but thought better of it, and returned his visitor's greeting cheerily enough.

"I have a little business, Crisp," said Frank. "Come across to the *Chesterwood*, and have some hock-and-soda, and cool yourself, and talk it over."

"With pleasure," responded Mr. Crisp; but before starting, went into the cupboard from which he had taken the towel, and after a pleasant splashing there emerged rosy but cool. Struggling into his coat, he grew hot again; and his baldness, before he covered it with his hat, once more gleamed damply. They walked across the sunny street together and into the the old-fashioned hotel.

"Jenny, my dear," said Frank, shaking hands with the pretty barmaid, "let me have a bottle of hock and two bottles of soda, and a ton of ice, and some good cigars. Send them up to the coffee-room at once. There's nobody there, I suppose? Mr. Crisp and I want to talk business."

"There's no one there, Mr. Frank," responded the pretty barmaid; and Mr. Crisp and Frank went up together.

"Did it ever strike you, Crisp—" said Frank

He got no further, for Mr. Crisp, arising with a look of settled determination upon his face, took a napkin from the buffet, unfolded it, and approached the window with a stealthy step. "You know how you caught me, Mr. Fairholt," said the managing clerk, with a dark and tragic look. "It was after this fellow then; but I'll finish him this time." A blue-bottle buzzed harmlessly on the pane, and Mr. Crisp, with one dexterous flick of his napkin slew him, and bore his body triumphantly to the table, where he inurned it with cigar-ashes.

"I beg your pardon," said Mr. Crisp. "You were saying, Had I ever noticed—"

"I was saying," returned Frank, "that here comes the prettiest girl in this division of the county, bearing in her fair hands the best of liquors for a day like this.—Your health, Jenny.—Yours, Crisp. Pretty tipple! Try a weed." Frank strolled to the mirror, and admired himself, with a tall glass in one hand and a cigar in the other. He laid down his glass in order to smooth his moustache and to arrange his hat and his curls, and swaggered calmly round on Crisp.

"What's the business, Mr. Fairholt?" asked the managing clerk lazily, from a cloud of smoke.

"Oh, it's not much," Frank returned. "I've been going rather too rapidly up in town, and I don't care about falling on the governor; and so my brother Will has just done this for me." He

produced a purse, and took therefrom a piece of stamped paper, and threw it across the table to Mr. Crisp.

"M-m-m," said Mr. Crisp, taking it up and looking at it. "Two hundred? And four months? I wouldn't do this kind of thing too often, Mr. Fairholt. Do you want me to cash it?"

"Yes," said Frank carelessly, "if you will be so good."

"Well, of course I'll do it," Mr. Crisp responded with expostulatory voice and manner. "But I wouldn't try this game too often, if I were you. It's a bad game. Of course Mr. Will's name is good enough for two hundred here, and it sha'n't pass out of our hands.—Crœsus Brothers? Yes; they're our London agents." Mr. Crisp turned the blue paper over in his hands and continued, "You can't work a dead horse, you know, and it's just like trying to do that, to work for money when you've spent it already. So I'd just advise you, Mr. Fairholt, to do as little in this way as you possibly can."

"I don't think I shall trouble you again, Crisp. In point of fact, I've been going the pace up there to such an extent that I was obliged to do it now. But", added Frank jauntily, "I'm going to settle down, and train for matrimony. By the way, I have to start by the 12.10. We'll finish our hock, and then go over to the bank together."

Mr. Crisp nodded acquiescence; and they

talked about indifferent matters for a time, and then, the cigars and the wine being both finished, returned to the bank, where Mr. Crisp handed over notes and gold to the amount of the bill, minus interest at three and a half per cent. per annum, shoand Frank ok hands and departed.

The train flashed through the peaceful western country, and Frank, as he looked lazily from the other scene for a picture some day. But in an hour or thereabouts he fell asleep, and did not awake until he found his ticket demanded. The train panted into Euston Station shortly afterwards, and the young artist took a hackney-coach and trundled to his rooms in Montague Gardens. Arrived there he found several letters awaiting him, and amongst them one which ran thus:—

"7 Acre Buildings, City.

"Sir,—When last I saw you, I gave you a week to look about yourself. That was a fortnight ago, and if things are not settled by Thursday next, I shall have to make a row.—Your obedient servant,

"Aminadab Tasker.

"*P. S.*—I shall wait for you here not later than six o'clock on Thursday evening."

"Confound the fellow!" said Frank, pulling at his curls and surveying his own reflection in the

mirror above the mantel-piece. "And it's five o'clock already. I suppose I must go down and see him. It's a horrible nuisance, now that I have money in my pocket, that I must turn it out so soon. One hundred and sixty to him, and I'm left with only fifty pounds in the wide wide world, and with this affair of Will's hanging over me. Well, it's got to be done, I suppose." So Frank emerged from his chambers, hailed another coach, was driven to the city, and reached 7 Acre Buildings.

Acre Buildings lay off Cheapside. They were houses of that old and stately fashion with which the city once upon a time abounded, but which are growing rarer now. Notwithstanding their stateliness and age, there was an air of *bourgeoisie* about them; and they had something of the aspect of prosperous citizens, whose station being secured in life, had fallen a little from the noise and bustle of common business. Passing from crowded Cheapside into the court that leads to Acre Buildings, you passed from noise to quiet and from heat to shade. The buildings stood round a square flagged court, with a dial in the centre. The finger had rusted and fallen from the dial long ago, as though Time stood still in Acre Buildings and needed no finger to mark his progress any more. The dial was defaced and broken, as if Time's reign were over, and the image of his rule destroyed. But nowhere did Time move onward

with a quicker step or one more certain than at No. 7, and with those whose needs might lead them to its presiding genius. There were a few trees, and the aspect of the whole place was calm and countrified and pleasant.

In No. 7 Acre Buildings there was an office on the second floor. The black outer door bore in white letters the name 'A. Tasker.' Just then A. Tasker stood with his face to the wall, as though he had been guilty of some misdemeanour, and an inscription on the glass panel of an inner door dumbly requested the passer-by to walk in. Obeying this voiceless injunction, Frank found himself confronted by a small boy, with a dry sandy complexion, and a head of dry sandy hair.

"Is Mr. Tasker at home?"

"Yes," responded the boy aggressively; "he is."

"Tell him I wish to see him."

"You can't see him; leastways not yet," returned the boy, contemplating a fly-spotted almanac on the wall. "He's engaged. You'll have to wait."

"Give him that, and tell him that I won't wait."

The small boy, with some hesitation, took Frank's card, and passed with it into an inner room, and returning after a minute's absence, said, "Please to come this way, sir."

Frank followed, and found Mr. Tasker alone. He was a short and thick-set man, was Mr. Tasker,

with gaudy thick-set rings on red and thick-set fingers. He wore a burly watch-chain crossed and re-crossed several times above a burly waistcoat. As Frank entered, a whiff of macassar and musk, proceeding from the sleek head and flourishing bandana of Mr. Tasker, assaulted his nostrils—a mingled odour like that which greets the lounger in the Strand as he passes Rimmel's on a languid day. Mr. Tasker's eyes were bright and beady. Mr. Tasker's nose was magnificently Hebraic. His lips and teeth were eminently carnivorous. His face was clean shaven except for a black imperial on the chin. His manner was one of uneasy self-confidence.

"I was told you were engaged," said Frank.

"A mistake, sir," Mr. Tasker answered through that magnificent Hebraic nose. "Will you take a chair? You have called about that little matter?"

"I have called," said Frank, contemptuously angry, "to take myself out of your Hebrew clutches, Mr. Tasker, and to tell you how much you deserve a caning for this piece of insolence." He threw Mr. Tasker's note carelessly on the table, and produced his pocket-book.

"No, sir," said Mr. Tasker, insinuating remonstrance through the Hebraic nose; "not insolence, my dear sir—not insolence. A little friendly reminder."

"Do me the favour not to be friendly, if you

please," Frank answered. "Produce your bond. Here is your pound of flesh."

Mr. Tasker smiled—a little tiger-like. "Gentlemen say what they like to me, sir."

"So I should suppose," Frank returned. "Is this the note?"

"I hope, Mr. Fairholt," said Mr. Tasker, creasing out the tigerish smile from his lips with his thick-set jewelled fingers—"I hope you are not displeased with my way of doing business. I do all I gan to oblige you, sir—everything." Mr. Tasker gathers up the notes, and continues, "This was only our zecond dransaction, sir; and now that I see how bunctual you are—"

"Don't trouble yourself, Tasker. Do me the favour not to know me when you see me; and good-day." With that Frank swaggered from the room; and as Mr. Tasker took the thick-set hand from his own lips the tigerish smile came back again.

"Go your way, young gentleman; but if I lay my hand upon you again, I will pay you.—Do not be friendly, Tasker? Do me the favour not to know me? Here is your pound of flesh? Your bound of vlesh?" snarled Mr. Tasker, becoming more German as he gave his wrath free vent. "I will haf my bound of vlesh when I get my jance." And what with the tigerish smile, and the thick-set lips, and the carnivorous teeth, and the beady eyes, Mr. Tasker really looked as though

he employed no hyperbole, but meant that pound of flesh in downright gastronomic earnest. Having locked his cash-box and patted it comfortably on the top, and stroked it with all his thick-set jewelled fingers, Mr. Tasker opened a door opposite to that by which Frank had entered, and said to some one in the inner room, "This way, sir, if you please. The gentleman is gone."

In answer to this summons appeared Benjamin Hartley, of Hartley Park and Hall. "I didn't catch the name," says Mr. Hartley. "Who was that, eh, Tasker?"

"A Mr. Fairholt, sir—a Mr. Francis Fairholt."

"Eh? eh? eh? Come now, Tasker, I've never seen his name in them there books of yours."

"Well, the fact is, sir," Mr. Tasker explained through the Hebraic medium, "I knew the gentleman was a neighbour of yours, and I thought it would be best to be quiet until the thing was paid."

"Now, look here, Tasker!" says Mr. Hartley, shaking a warning finger at him—"I know your little game too well. You ain't going to humbug *me!* This ain't the first time, Tasker, as I've found you tryin' that fast and loose dodge on. Do you know how much of my coin you've got in this little business?"

"I cannot tell you at a moment's notice, sir."

"Then I can. Seven thousand five hundred pound. I'll draw it, every farthin', and smash you

if you come them games with me. Fact. I've more than half a mind to do it now. This kind o' game's low, and I've got no business to be mixed up with it."

"If you will not be too sudden, sir," says Mr. Tasker, in nasal supplication. "I have saved a little; I could carry it on in a small way on my own account—a very small way."

"I don't know why," says Mr. Hartley, chewing a gloved forefinger—"I don't know why your people trust you. But I tell you, Tasker, *I* wouldn't trust you. No—not with a bad farthin'. Not as far as I could fling a bull by the tail."

"My bonds," said Mr. Tasker, extending the jewelled hands.

"Your bonds!" returned Mr. Hartley. "Your bonds is straw."

"I kept this secret," said Mr. Tasker, "from the best motives, sir."

"Don't talk to me about your motives. I make a point of knowin' this business, and all about it. I *will* know. It pays me in a hundred ways, as you can't guess of, and ain't goin' to be let to guess of. Now, you do this again, and I'll keep my word." Mr. Hartley rose to go, but paused at the door. "Twelve to-morrow, at my hotel. And just remember what I've told you. Do you hear? Remember! Our terms of business is these: Ten per cent. per annum, payable quarterly to me, and me to have full knowledge of the

way all moneys is expended. You seem to have forgot that, Tasker. Just you remember it. Remember it!" With that he went away, and Mr. Tasker was left alone.

"I will remember," said that gentleman darkly to himself—"I will remember. I can znap my vingers at you." Mr. Tasker's scowling face changed as his patron re-entered.

"I've got one thing as I want to mention, Tasker," said Mr. Hartley, closing the door behind him, and advancing. "You've been dealin' with Mr. Francis Fairholt. How often?"

"Twice."

"How much?"

"This time one-sixty with expenses. Less last time."

"Well, don't you have any more truck with him. If he wants money, he deals with me. That young gentleman belongs to a good old county family. He's the son of a neighbour and a friend o' mine. I believe," says Mr. Hartley, with a slightly oratorical manner, "as his 'ouse will shortly be alloyed with mine in matrimony. So you leave him alone." Having given this injunction, Mr. Hartley softened, and said, "Good-day, Tasker," and so went out, and down the stairs.

Left alone, Mr. Tasker took the cash-box in his hands, and darkly meditated. "It is a good thing to hate some one," says Mr. Tasker, with the tigerish smile flashing out again. "It ztirs the

blood, and makes a man lifely." With this pleasant reflection Mr. Tasker opened a safe, consigned the cash-box to its depths, locked it up again, took his hat, and cane, and gloves, threw a nosy word of dismissal at the sandy-complexioned boy in the anteroom, made the outer door secure, passed up Cheapside, through St. Paul's Churchyard, Fleet Street, and the Strand, and turned into a club near Covent Garden. Here he made a dinner of the best the place afforded, and afterwards repaired to the smoke-room, where he drank a good deal of brandy-and-water, and smoked a cigar above the money columns of the morning paper. He sat alone for nearly an hour, when he was joined by a languid young man of three or four-and-twenty. The new-comer was almost as plentifully jewelled as Tasker himself, but carried off his finery with a better grace. He wore a light flaxen moustache, and his long and light brown hair was parted in the centre, and fell upon his collar. His hands were singularly white and delicate. His clothes were cut in the extreme of fashion, and his small feet were cased in shoes of patent leather.

"Ah," said the new arrival, "my Tasker!" He settled himself on a lounge beside the money-lender, and regarded him with a look of amused curiosity. "My Tasker smoking of the best, and reclining, as is his wont, in gorgeous ease and jewelled opulence. What new spoil from the Philistines? What new booty from Egypt?"

Mr. Tasker looked upon him with a frown, and through the Hebraic nose inquired whether he couldn't leave the shop behind him.

"Most worthy of Israelites," returned the other, "master of Golconda's mine, priest of Ormuz' golden shrine, I have no shop. But you, Tasker —pardon the simile—resemble the patient snail, and carry your shop about with you. Or shall I withdraw that, and say that you carry your profession in your face, which is in itself a most potent letter of recommendation to all good fellows who can spend money and have no money to spend?"

Mr. Tasker waved the subject off. "Talk about that to-morrow, Mr. Hastings, at Acre Buildings."

"Most worthy Tasker, to-morrow is not now. I am impecunious."

"I cannot do business now," responded Mr. Tasker.

"Really, Tasker," said the other carelessly, "you may perform works of necessity even upon the Sabbath. You may lift your ass from the pit, for instance. I invite you to lift him. Break through the Sabbath of your saintly rest, and let me have a fiver till the morning."

"It is against my rule, Mr. Hastings," Tasker responds.

"Rules, my Tasker? We are Hebrew and

Christian, who change like water, not Mede and Persian, who alter not."

"I cannot do it, and I will not," said Mr. Tasker.

"Now, my Tasker," said the other with a languidly curious admiration of him, "I know you to be in earnest. I recognise that Teuton tone, that voice of stern resolve. I shall have to be down on somebody else."

The money-lender shifted in his chair, and took a great gulp at his brandy-and-water.

"Try one my weeds, Tasker? I guarantee them good. A man in my position can't afford to owe for bad cigars."

"You are going at a good rate, Mr. Hastings," said Tasker, taking a cigar. "You will land somewhere in time."

"Is Tasker among the prophets? I shall land somewhere in splendid company. Pay for a liquor, Tasker, and I'll tell you something."

"Tell me something," returned Mr. Tasker, with his tigerish smile, "that is worth a liquor, and then I may."

"Don't bring things down to this base commercial level.—Do you know Fairholt?"

"Do I know Vairhold?" repeated Mr. Tasker, turning suddenly round, whilst his black eyebrows were drawn almost over his beady eyes.

"Once more he is Teutonic. Has he sold you?"

"No," said Mr. Tasker, sliding back into his former position, and biting his nails, as he regarded the other through half-shut eyes. "He has not sold me. But I will sell *him*, if he comes again into my hands."

"Yes; we will sell him—to the Egyptians—for a mess of pottage. The allusions are mixed and inappropriate; but in a world of follies, what is one folly more?"

"He is an in-zo-lent dog!"

"I rather thought you had had a row, because when I met him in the Strand an hour ago he pitched into you to me. I mentioned your respected name, my Tasker, and instantly—to employ the words of the poet—black anger all his visage clouded. If you deny the validity of that quotation, I myself will don the poet's robe and ape a Bourbon in a crown of straws.—To return. Mr. Fairholt brings certain accusations against you. He says you are a blood-sucking Shylock; that you are a cringing, abject rascal; that you are a bullying ruffian. These are the heads of his indictment. Don't you think all this is worth a liquor?"

At none of this did Mr. Tasker by word or sign express displeasure; but as he sat looking with those half-shut eyes at his companion, his heavy hand found as much as it could do to smooth the creases of that wicked smile about his mouth.

"Your admirer, Tasker, has invited me to his rooms to-night. We shall have a quiet little hand at *vingt-et-un*. There are two or three fellows coming to join in—shall I say the mazy dance? That seems to round the sentence off. But I can't play at *vingt-et-un* without coin, my Tasker. Have you ever known, you Crœsus, that want of pence which vexes public men? No. He has never known it. One touch of nature makes the whole world kin, and my Tasker is no kinsman of mine, in this regard. The wounded is the feeling heart. My Tasker, unwounded by the shafts of poverty, smiles on the sufferings of her victims. What saith that victim of the roseate god, young Romeo? 'He jests at scars that never felt a wound!' Have pity, Tasker. Let me have a fiver, and I will revenge you on Fairholt. The croaking raven doth bellow for revenge. Let it be ten, and make the vengeance deeper."

"Leave the shop until to-morrow morning, Mr. Hastings."

"Won't he," said Hastings looking on him as though he were some curious and unknown creature brought there for scientific examination—"won't he buy vengeance at so cheap a rate? Here is a first-class practical revenge offered dirt cheap, and not accepted."

"Who tells you," said Mr. Tasker, speaking more through his nose than ever, "that I want revenge?"

The other laughed mischievously, but returned no answer; and Mr. Tasker rang the bell and called for more brandy and water. He drank it savagely, while the waiter stood there, and then asked for more.

"What is that to you?" returned Tasker with a nasal snarl. "You have egsided me; you have annoyed me; you have made me angry with his name. He is an inzolent dog!"

"This does you credit, Tasker! Try Shylock at Drury. Kean is not worth his own carving-knife and scales compared with you. Oh, answer to the Muse's call! It is the Muse, the jolly Muse!"

Mr. Tasker, still regarding his companion darkly, raised his glass to his lips and imbibed its contents. He fell back slowly as he drank, and threw back his head; but he maintained that fixed look until he regarded Hastings through the bottom of his glass. Hastings, lolling on the settee, looked over at him in return with a mild expression of interested curiosity. "Come up and join your admirer, Tasker. He will be glad to see you. You shall be well desired in Cyprus. Come love, come."

Mr. Tasker produced a pocket-book, and took therefrom two crisp and rustling notes. He laid them down upon the table, and took from another compartment of the pocket-book a little strip of blue paper with a raised stamp at one end. Taking pen and ink from a stand on a table at the other

side of the room, he returned, and seating himself near Hastings, filled up the form. "Fifteen, at four months."

"Hail, worthy Timon! That's at the rate of a hundred and fifty per centum per annum."

"It will pay you if you win," said Mr. Tasker darkly and thickly. "I hope you may." He rose, and allowing the evil smile full play for once, put on his hat, and tapping his companion lightly on the shoulder, proceeded: "Ztrip him, and zend him back to me. If you will do zo much, you are welcome to those." And with this final expression of feeling Mr. Tasker went a little unsteadily from the club, hailed a passing coach, and was driven home.

Mr. Hastings looked at his cigar as if he questioned it while he said, "I can employ the words of my friend Mr. Puff of *The Critic*. "Well —pretty well; but not quite perfect; so, ladies and gentlemen, if you please, we'll rehearse this piece again to-morrow."

He laughed, with sudden triumph, flung through half-a-dozen steps in burlesque imitation of a Highland dance, and being detected by a waiter who entered at that moment, regarded the intruder sternly, cast an imaginary cloak over his shoulder after the manner of the stage brigand, and left the room in time to see Mr. Tasker drive away.

CHAPTER VI.

HISTORY.

A slipshod, threadbare figure clad in weedy black.

It was two o'clock A.M. in the Strand. Looked at from the gate of that obstructive church which faces westward in the centre of the thoroughfare, beneath the quivering gaslamps on either side lay a gleaming desolation. No footstep broke the silence of the night. It was a true English summer; the night-air was chill and raw; and a thin, persistent drizzle fell upon the slippery flags, the muddy horse-road, and the gleaming fronts of houses. A deserted London. It was too early for the market riot close at hand—too late for the homeward-reeling tavern roysterer. The great city slept, and the quiet heavens mourned over it. Even they, bending so long above it, had lost their brightness and their purity. They wept above the city with thin tears, and a dreary wind was seeking here and there with mournful voices, for a something lost. A deserted London—a city of the dead. No soul abroad—not even the oilskin-capped and caped policeman.

Who is this? A slipshod, threadbare figure, clad in weedy black, which clings moistly about him, as though he had come up from the depths of that vile river which laps the pillars of the Bridge of Sighs, hard by. The figure crouched

for refuge from the rain against a door which stood not more than a foot back from the flagged pathway, and his unwholesome garments shone with wet at every projecting angle. His boots gaped at the toes, and were so rotten and ragged at the sole, that they made a splashing noise within themselves whenever the wearer moved his feet, as he did often and uneasily, half in impatience, and half in search of warmth. From where he stood, the wet street gleamed beneath the gas-lamps like a river; and dead asleep as the great city might be, there was yet in the air a faint and distant hum, which spoke the seething life about him.

He peered from his meagre sheltering-place often. There came the measured tread of a policeman; and slinking from his shelter, and holding close to the wet shutters of the shop he passed, the man concealed himself in an entry. The measured tread went by, and he emerged stealthily and took up his old position. There he waited and watched until a door on the opposite side of the street was opened, and with a curt 'Good-night,' addressed to some one within, a man came out upon the street, and stepped briskly westward. The shivering figure left the doorway, and with his black rags fluttering in the wind, and gleaming in the gaslight and the rain crossed the street. The man in front, greatcoated, well booted, vigorous, hummed an air as he walked, and kept

time to it in his sturdy march. The shuddering, gleaming, ragged wretch behind him panted and groaned as he hurried in his footsteps. At last, however, he came up with him, and laid a hand upon his arm.

The man who was thus accosted turned, faced his follower, and recognised him. "Hillo! What's the matter?"

"'Scuse me, sir," said the other, panting still after his brief run; "but I thought I might make so bold, sir. I went down to your place, sir, an' they told me you'd gone out, and wheer you'd gone, an' so I made bold for to follow you an' wait for you, sir." Here he paused to cough huskily behind his wasted hand.

"Well?" the other asked.

"She's in an awful state, sir—dyin', sir. Would you be so good as come an' look at her?"

"Couldn't you have gone to the parish surgeon?"

"I went to him at five o'clock to-night, sir; an' again at nine; an' again at 'leven, an' he hadn't come home neither time."

"Well, I suppose I must go?" returned the doctor, in a grumbling tone.

"God bless you, sir," said the other; "I know'd you would."

"Don't humbug me, Penkridge," replied the doctor. "You'll want all your breath for your walk. Come along."

They turned back, threaded through half-a-

dozen winding streets between the Strand and Oxford Street, and at last turned into a low, dark, and noisome entry, which led them to a court, whose poverty and squalor were picturesque in the light of a single gas-lamp. The inhabitants might have preferred perhaps that it should be less picturesque and better lighted, as the doctor, stumbling along the broken and uneven pavement, certainly would.

"Now, lead the way," said the doctor brusquely, as they paused before a door. The man pushed the door open. It moved only upon one hinge, and grated upon the broken bricks behind it. It opened flush upon a staircase, above which hung an oil-lamp, emitting a dim light and a sickly odour. The stairs, like the court, were broken and uneven, and the balustrades were gone here and there altogether; having been either broken up for fuel, or destroyed in the course of some battle amongst the inhabitants of the house. The doctor and his companion passed up several flights of stairs, and came upon a room which seemed at first sight to be deserted. It was faintly illumined by the light of a candle stuck against the wall, and holding there by the congealed grease which had gathered from it. The wall above it was blackened by a tapering streak of smoke. In one corner of the room the shadows seemed to rest deeper than elsewhere; but as the eyes grew accustomed to the dim light, these shadows resolved

themselves into the figure of a woman, stretched upon a heap of shavings, and covered by a piece of tattered sacking.

"Bring the light," said the doctor, kneeling down over this figure.

His companion obeyed him.

"Why, what's this?" the doctor asked, turning down the sacking and disclosing the face of a child, evidently not more than a few weeks old.

"That's it," said the man kneeling beside him. At the apparent risk of setting the couch of shavings on fire—since he still held the candle in his hand— he took up the child. "Tell me what you think of her, please, sir," he asked, indicating the recumbent figure by a motion of the hand.

The doctor bent farther over, and laid his finger on a wasted wrist. The man knelt by him, holding the candle to her face and watching him keenly. The doctor's hand passed from the wrist to the region of the heart. Then he took the candle and examined the face. He laid the tip of a finger upon an eyelid and raised it. The eye remained open, staring in a ghastly way. The doctor closed it again, gave back the candle, and arose. The man also arose and faced him, holding the child in his left arm. The doctor shook his head.

"You don't mean to say, sir," the man asked whimpering, "as you can't do nothin' for her?"

The doctor, with a motion of the hand towards that recumbent figure in the corner, answered, "She has been dead an hour." The man dropped the candle and the child, and fell upon his knees with a sharp cry. The candle, unextinguished, lay upon the shavings, and the doctor set his foot upon it just in time. The wail of the child struck through the darkness; and the doctor, groping his way down-stairs, found the malodorous lamp at the bottom, and returned with it—the child's cry assailing his ears all the time. The man still knelt beside the couch, and had taken one of the dead hands in both his own. The child lay unheeded until the doctor set the lamp upon the floor and took her in his arms, and examined her limbs, to see how far she had been injured by her fall. She screamed and writhed with pain; but the man on the floor took no heed until the doctor laid a hand upon his shoulder.

"Penkridge," said the doctor, "is this your child?"

The man looked stupidly at him, but returned no answer.

"Is this your child, Penkridge?" the doctor asked again.

"Yes," responded the man stonily. "Mine an' hers. God help her! Mine an' hers." He muttered this over and over again until he got it into a sort of rhythm, which was arrested by the doctor's hand again laid upon his shoulder.

"Do you know you have damaged the child seriously? Get up. You can do no good there."

The man dropped the thin hand he had held within his own, and arose.

"Have you any friends in the house?" the doctor asked.

He shook his head dismally, and said he had no friends. "Her was the larst," he said, and looked stonily down upon her.

"Have you nobody you can ask to take care of the child? Is there no womanly neighbour who could see to it in the morning?"

He shook his head once more, answering that he didn't know, and repeated, "Her was the larst."

"Have you any money?"

The man laughed drarily, and shook his head.

"Any fuel? Any food?"

He shook his head again, and answered, "Not a mossel of anythin'."

As the doctor stood in perplexity with the wailing child still in his arms, a tap at the door was heard, and the face of a woman looked into the apartment. "Good mornin', docthor," said the face. "Will I be able to do anything for you?"

"You are a perfect blessing at this minute, Mrs. Closky," the doctor answered.

"Ah, poor thing," said Mrs. Closky, looking down at the miserable couch of shavings, "her

throubles is over. It don't take much lookin' to see that; God be good to us.—Ye tiny crathur, what chune's that yere singin'? Lend her to me, docthor dear. An' 'tis plain *he's* flured, poor crathur. Take him away down to Mick on the second flure, docthor, an' lave me to do the decent thing by her. I moind her when she was respictable an' well to do; an' him tew, wid a decent little place o' business, till he fell in wid Misther Tasker, roast his sowl!"

"Is there any other woman in the house, Mrs. Closky," asks the doctor, "or in the court? Any woman who could help you here to take care of the child, and so forth?"

"Sure, I'll manage, docthor," responds Mrs. Closky. "What is it that's the matther wid the child?"

"She has had a fall, and is badly hurt, I am afraid."

"Will I bring her down to Nelly then?" the woman asked. "Fetch the light wid ye, docthor, av ye plaze, an' fetch him along to Mick. I heerd ye comin' in, an' I see the poor crathur there wasn't far off takin' the blessed journey a month ago. An' when I see ye goin' down stairs to bring the lamp just now, I thought that maybe ye might be wantin' somebody, an' I slipped up. Mick's in bed, and so's Nelly; but I'll not be a minute gettin' 'em out."

Mrs. Closky led the way down stairs with the

child in her arms, the doctor following with the lamp, and Penkridge bringing up the rear. The room into which the woman conducted her companions was almost as sparsely furnished as that they had just quitted. It boasted a table—contrived from a crate and an old door; and several tea-chests, which served as seats. A curtain hung half across the room, and on the near side of it a girl lay on a rough mattress, with an old great-coat wrapped about her. Mrs. Closky disappeared behind the curtain, and after an audible colloquy with her husband, in the course of which both he and she cursed with unnecessary vehemence, induced him to rise and show himself. He came forth sleepy-eyed and scarcely sober; but at the sight of the doctor, professed himself ready to do anything in his power to oblige that gentleman, "from wilful murther downwards."

"Howld your tongue, ye omadhaun," says Mrs. Closky; "an' bring a dhrop o' comfort for the poor sowl here that's lost his wife; the heavens be her bed this noight!"

Thus commissioned, Mr. Closky retired behind the curtain, and shortly reappeared with a black bottle and a wine-glass without a foot, and invited his visitor to drink. The invitation was at first declined, with a shake of the head; but Mr. Closky grew pressing, and Penkridge at length took the footless glass and said, "My humble respects to all," and drank. Mr. Closky, by way of "toast"

or "sentiment," conversationally coupling his vital jewel and the pit of Tophet, followed his example. The doctor occupied himself with the child, and having made use of such soothing appliances as were within reach, went away, promising to return in the morning, and leaving a few coins with Mrs. Closky for the use of the baby, until some further provision could be made.

Mrs. Closky laid the child down by her daughter, and having instructed her to take care of it, went upstairs to perform the last decent and composing offices for the dead. The two men sat and drank, turn and turn about, from the footless glass; and Mr. Closky grew noisily cheerful.

"Oi didn't know that ye was resoid'n' in this neebourhood, Misther Penkridge," said Mr. Closky. "An' it's odd now the way that owld frinds is always meetin' in this big city. Oi remimber ye whin ye wor the gintleman complate, wid your shop an' your trap, an' your little servant gyurl, an' whin I'd no oidaya that ye'd iver be sittin' an' dhrinkin' with the loike o' me."

"I hope I never acted proud toward you, sir," returns Penkridge, tearfully; "which I assure you, sir, that if I die, it was foreign to me so to do. My poor pardner, sir, as is now a-lyin' dead upstairs, it were also foreign to. I have knowed prosperity, an' I knowed this," he continues, waving his threadbare sleeves in illustration, "but I never had

no pride, sir, an' neither did my pardner which is gone."

"Oi'd ask no sweeter pleasure," returns Mr. Closky, "than to brain the blagyard that said ye had."

At this the shabby creature melts in tears. "I loved her dear; heaven knows, I loved her dear!"

Mr. Closky shakes hand with his companion, and presses the glass upon him. "It's loikely ye don't remimber me at all, Misther Penkridge. Oi remimber yew in the days o' your prosper'ty well. Oi've had me own days o' prosper'ty, an' oi know —no man betther—what comin' down in the wurld manes. Hadn't oi as foine an' nate a little public as ye'd wish to foind, till oi came to grief with borrowed money?"

The other took no notice of his speech, but looked blankly before him, with tears in his maudlin eyes.

"Just be doon me a favour, Misther Penkridge. But wait while oi provide ye with a tay cup. There; it's not the clanest, but oi'll do with it. Take the glass. Fill up. Oi want ye to drink a health to a frind of ours. Here's to the blissid an' holy memory o' Misther Aminadab Tasker, and may he—"

"Who?" cried the other, rising to his feet.

"The noble gintleman that brought the pair of us to this pass, Misther Penkridge."

The tatterdemalion's face flushed, and for a moment he was almost a man. "Drink that scoun-

drel's 'ealth, sir? Not me. It's him as ruined me. It's him as dragged me down to this. It's him as has had me in his cruel grip for 'ears an' 'ears. It's him as 'll have to answer for my pardner-in-life, sir. Drink his 'ealth! I'd like to make a hend of him; I would, if I'd got him 'ere."

"When oi think of 'm," rejoined Mr. Closky, "oi loike to drink a health to 'm. Ye've no oidaya how oi love 'm."

"You've no idea, sir, what a weight he's been to me, sir. You've no idea, sir; you can't have, or you wouldn't talk like that."

"Are ye bloind?" cried Mr. Closky with sudden anger. "Are ye mad? Can't ye ondherstand diversion when ye listen to't? Wouldn't oi loike to have me fingers on the neck of 'm? Don't oi know that what he's been to me he's been to you, the blood-sucking blagyard! Haven't oi promised day an' noight, and noight an' day, to have his blood?"

Penkridge stared at the Irishman for a moment, and then, in answer to the other's invitation, "Drink your will of him," tossed off the contents of his glass, and sat down. "Not as I like that sort of talk, sir," he said, relapsing into the maudlin stage again.

The other snapped his fingers. "Don't oi know 'm? Haven't oi watched 'm from his office, an' watched 'm home? That's a little treat oi'm fond o' givin' meself whin oi know oi'm sober. If

oi did it whin the dhrink's in me, it wouldn't be safe. Oi could *not* howld off 'm."

"My poor pardner, sir," says Penkridge, "never forgave him, sir, for what he done to us."

"Look at 'm now," cried the other, "with his jools, an' his foine house, an' his offices! Look at 'm rowlin' in wealth. He doesn't do business with the loikes o' you an' me now, Misther Penkridge. No, no. The gintleman's got bigger fish to fry. He's loanin' hundreds where he used to loan a pound. Drink your wish to 'm. There's another bottle. Never fear, me darlin', but we'll see ye paid yet, av we take a most onpleasant journey for it."

The contents of the first black bottle being exhausted, Mr. Closky produced another, and grew wilder in his threats and darker in his expressions of hatred. After an hour or two of drinking and raving, he fell asleep, and Penkridge followed his example. It was broad summer daylight when the latter awoke, and with the fumes of the liquor still upon him staggered down the stairs and out of the court. The way he took led him into Oxford Street, where he rambled blindly for a little while, blinking in the sunlight like an owl, and holding himself and all his looped and windowed raggedness together with his arms. Suddenly, as he took his slouching way, he was pushed somewhat heavily by the burly figure of a hurried passenger, and looking up, recognised the magnificent Hebraic

nose and the carnivorous lips and teeth of Mr. Tasker. With the desperation of drink and the memory of last night's anger upon him, he laid hold of Tasker's arm.

"Mis' Tasker—now I've got you. Do' know me, I s'pose, sir? Oh, yes, y' do. Know me v'ry well indeed. My name's Penk—"

"Policeman," said Mr. Tasker calmly to an official who passed at the moment, "will you take this man away?"

"Come now," said the officer, taking Mr. Penkridge by the collar. "*You* move on. That's what you've got to do, you know. Move on."

"Mis' Tasker, you've had poun's out o' me. Haven't got a farthin' in the world. Give me shillin'!"

The official disengaged Mr. Penkridge's hold, and swung him into the gutter.

"Drunk and disorderly," said Mr. Tasker. "You should take him up, officer."

The officer took him up a little roughly, and holding him before him by the collar, conveyed him to the nearest station.

Mr. Tasker took his smiling way down Holborn.

CHAPTER VII.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY.

"He is gone," he said—"gone without a trace."

WHAT a charm clings always about the past. It is easy to believe and graceful to proclaim the exceeding happiness of childhood. But I am not at all sure that most men's raptures on this matter are very real, or that they are always based on any very vivid recollection. It is certain that the man who is distracted by the playful noises of children has forgotten his own childhood. A remembrance of early boyhood is a retention of infancy. The juvenile man remembers his juvenility. Looking back, I am conscious of the fact that there is between me and the time I look at, an atmosphere of glamour. The child of my remembrance is partly—or I fear so—the child of my own after-creation. I have moulded and modelled my infant memories; or if I have not, I am indeed fallen. "God help thee, Elia—how art thou changed!—thou art sophisticated! I know how honest, how courageous—for a weakling—thou wert, how religious, how imaginative, how hopeful!"

But if ever I was happy, I know that I was happy then—in the first month I spent in Island

Hall. Waking in the morning—I remember now how the wet boughs would tap against the window, and how the late dawn came greyly in between the white curtains—I woke to a sense of luxury in my surroundings which was altogether new and strange and beautiful. Every day's breakfast was an event. Aunt Bertha was president over that simple table; Sally was in invariable attendance; and it was there that Polly and I made our first daily encounter. My heart had fastened to each of them.

In what other respect soever my afterthoughts have moulded memory, I am quite sure about one matter. Taking leave to regard myself as I was at that time—as indeed I very fairly may—as a creature altogether differing from my present self, I am inclined to think that the chief part I played in this episode of my life must have been very pleasant to the onlooker. I bend over myself now —over that past child-self—in a sorrowful wonder that the chivalrous and tender soul I knew it, should ever have fallen thus away—could possibly have degenerated into that poor creature who wears his name, and who pretends to his adult personality.

I fell in love with Polly. Whether by the pure light of unadulterated nature I could have done so, I cannot guess; but I had reading enough to help out my imagining, and I fell in love. Polly ordered me whithersoever she would, and

was as conscious of my enslaved condition as I was myself. She was a sort of female Ahasverus —I a kind of male Esther, admitted to the royal courts from far by rare extension of the royal favour, and approaching with an almost sacred awe. The books to which I had access at this time were many and various. In one of them I found mention of a *jongleur*. I became a *jongleur*. With the delicate fervour of a minstrel, with the reticence and awe that minstrel might experience in the presence of his queen, I, in happy moments, was permitted to approach the throne of love, and to open up my budget of stories, travelling at times through those lands of grim humour known as *The History of the Three Bears*—which lands I explored under Polly's formal order—touching at times upon the terror of the Bluebard Chamber —unfolding, in antres vast and deserts idle the tent of Peribanou—sallying forth in disguise with Haroun Alraschid and the Grand Vizier—whose names, by the way, were a terror and a stumbling-block— and rising at times to the tragic heights of Little Red Ridinghood.

The season of the year went against the possibility of outdoor excursions. The greater part of our time was spent in that chamber in which I was first introduced to Polly. Polly would sit enthroned near the fireplace, whilst I, fenced round with books, occupied the corner farthest from the fire, and prepared myself for my story-telling

function. My queen's especial passion at this time was the cutting of scraps of paper into quaint devices—an operation in which Uncle Will at times engaged himself with a splendid adroitness. In her leisure hours, Polly generally sat with a pair of scissors in her hand, engaged in the manufacture of dragons and other wonders; and by a queenly wave of scissors or of dragon I was now and again admitted to audience. My business of amusement over, I was dismissed, being occasionally rewarded with a paper emblem of royalty's approval. At other times Polly would unbend, and would condescend to meet me on an equal footing.

It is easy enough, no doubt, for any adult person who may read this chronicle to laugh at those childish raptures; but I protest that at such times I was filled with a tranquillity of peace, a satisfied hope, such as I have never since experienced, such a soft gladness and chastened joy as might become the mind of some meek angel.

"God help thee, Elia—how art thou changed! —thou art sophisticated!"

I can remember quite distinctly how, under these influences, the past melted and grew undefined. It was a somewhat hard past, with not always enough to eat in it, and not always enough to wear: a past in which rude and domineering boy-giants, wearing clogs and corduroys, and addicted to the practice of mauling such unprotected

and inoffensive youth as they encountered, held evil place. I remember how far-off that past came to look; and yet it was always near enough to give an added relish to my security and comfort. I can thank heaven that it is near enough even now for that, and I can think of such as hold a like place with something more of sympathy and kindliness than I should probably have known without it. The only fragment of that near past which still remained forcibly with me was the face, and *it* had welded itself into my life in an altogether inexplicable way. I can only describe the feeling I had concerning it by saying that it seemed always in attendance in some anteroom of fancy, and always clamouring to be let in. It came to haunt me so that it grew into a habit of reproducing itself in other faces—the living faces of people about me. I saw it often, for instance, in Mr. Fairholt's face, in Uncle Will's, in Aunt Bertha's. It would flash out at unexpected times, and would disappear again as rapidly as it came, being gone before I could fix it. It was my constant companion when alone, and I often dreamed of it. My notions about it were all monstrous and undefined, always shifting, but always horrible. I suppose I must have been a morbidly fanciful child—as I know that I am now a morbidly fanciful man—but I had a decided joy in the fact of my personal proprietorship of this phantom. As I became more and more accustomed to its exigent presence in

that antechamber of fancy, I became also less afraid of being afraid, and often let it in of my own free-will, and extracted a delicious fright from it. This very soon brought about the result which might have been expected, and custom robbed the unwholesome pleasure of its keenness.

I had been at Island Hall exactly a month when I was witness to a conversation between Mr. Fairholt and Aunt Bertha. I was not often in his room; but was on this occasion carried down by Sally, who had been sent for me. She was evidently much disturbed, and was very defiant of something. As she carried me down stairs she hugged me several times, imprinting her buttons painfully on my frame in the strength of her affection. Tapping at the door of Mr. Fairholt's room, and being by him peevishly invited to come in, she entered, bearing me in her arms. I was ridiculously conscious, I remember, of a certain want of dignity in my own behalf in this proceeding; but when I made a motion to escape, Sally only held me tighter; and having been pretty strictly trained in ways of obedience to her, I stayed where I was. Mr. Fairholt was seated in an arm-chair near the fire, and Aunt Bertha stood on the rug, with one hand tapping on the mantel-piece.

"You may set down the child, and go, Troman," said Mr. Fairholt.

"Begging pardon, sir," said Sally; "but might I make bold to be allowed to stay?"

Mr. Fairholt looked up angrily.

"I brought him here," continued Sally, "on condition as he wasn't to be took away from me."

Mr. Fairholt looked at Aunt Bertha, casting his hands abroad fretfully, but said nothing.

Aunt Bertha turned and said,—

"Give me the child, Troman. Nothing shall be done that is not for his good; be sure of that. I will let you know what we have decided to do, as soon as we have decided anything."

"Thank you, ma'am," said Sally; and set me down and left the room.

Aunt Bertha took a seat, and drawing me to her side, put an arm about me.

"What possible object," asked the old gentleman, "do you think you can serve by bringing him here?"

"There are some people," said Aunt Bertha, with an angry little laugh, and a shake of her head, "who can only remember that which is directly under their noses. I want you to remember, Robert," she continued in a changed tone, "that you were almost as defenceless, though not so young, when his father helped you, and to refuse now to give him houseroom, does really seem to me inhuman."

There Aunt Bertha became angry again, and spoke with great decision.

Mr. Fairholt raised his eyes for a moment to meet hers, but dropped them hurriedly.

"I told you before," he said, "that I would give you a month to think what you would do with him. The month has gone, and you have done nothing."

"Surely," said Aunt Bertha, "you are not insensible to the claims he has upon you?"

"All this," said Mr. Fairholt, rising and walking in that irritated way of his up and down the room, "is very sentimental and womanly, and so forth, I have no doubt. But now what do I propose to you?" He stopped short before her, fidgeting with his hands; and she passed me over to the other side of her chair, and laid her left arm round my shoulder, drawing me to her, as if sheltering me. "I don't say, turn him out to starve. I don't even say, send him back with his old nurse, that—that *woman*, Troman." He spoke of Sally in an angry way, pausing before the word "woman," as if in search of some unpleasant adjective, and jerking it out spitefully when he decided upon it. "There's nothing inhuman or barbarous in what I propose to do. I tell you that I don't like the child. I tell you that he irritates and worries me. I tell you that I will not have him grow up with my daughter and in my house."

"Then," said Aunt Bertha, "what will you do?"

"I will do anything in reason—anything short of that. What do you ask me to do?"

"I ask you to do what seems to be your clear

duty," she responded. "The child is fatherless and motherless, and is your nephew."

"You talk nonsense, Bertha. He is not my nephew; he is not even yours. He is the son of my sister's husband's brother — *your* husband's brother. His mother I never knew. His father I have not even seen for years. And now you urge upon me the mere fact that I had a business loan from him—which I repaid, mind you, Bertha—which I repaid, honourably and with interest—every farthing. And you bring this as a reason why I should maintain the child, whom I dislike, and in whom I perceive the seeds of—the seeds of—of unpleasant influences—that I should maintain him, not as I like and as it suits me, but in your way; whether I like it or not, and whether it suits me or not—in my own house and in companionship with my child. I have told you already, Bertha, and I repeat it—it is preposterous."

Mr. Fairholt went up and down the room in a series of peevish jerks, and was of white with anger when he concluded. He resumed his seat, and sat in silence, except for a short gasp of incredulous indignation now and then.

"I don't say, Robert," said Aunt Bertha, persuasively, "that the relationship is a very intimate one; but still it is a relationship, and it must be recognised. I am sorry to hear you speak about the loan in that way. I think you have forgotten the facts." There Aunt Bertha again grew decided.

"It was not a business loan. No business man would have advanced it. You are certainly wrong about the interest. That, I remember, he declined to take."

"I don't care," said Mr. Fairholt, flushing a little. "I should have said that I offered it, that I—I pressed it upon him. I will not have the child in my house. He can be just as happy and as well-off elsewhere. Send him to school."

"The child," said Aunt Bertha, drawing me a little closer to her side, "is very young and delicate. He has no home of his own, nor have I. I can't at all understand your aversion to him; and I may tell you, Robert, once for all, that, sooner than see him discarded and shut out from home-influences, I will find a home of my own again, and take him with me."

"I don't mean that at all, Bertha," said Mr. Fairholt. "You know how glad I am to have you here."

Aunt Bertha smiled—a hard little smile—and said nothing.

He caught her glance for a moment furtively, and went on in haste, "Let him go to school, and come here for his holidays. Let him be sent to a good school. I don't grudge him that. But I cannot, and I will not have him here always. He annoys me; he worries me. When you speak, Bertha, of the claims his father had upon me, you speak ignorantly. Those claims were anaulled and

more than annulled by his conduct afterwards. You know that I never spoke to him for years."

"I did not know it," said Aunt Bertha, sadly; "and I am very sorry to hear it now."

"Of course," said he, irritated by her tone, "the separation, in your mind at least, would be of my seeking. But I tell you that he came here, and in this very room flaunted his favours in my face. I shall not attempt to justify myself."

"I make no accusation, Robert," she replied. "If you are willing to send the child to school, and to allow him to return here for his holidays, I am willing to accept that as a compromise. He is very young and very little." She looked down pityingly upon me, and in a vague sort of way I was conscious of feeling sorry for myself. And though the feeling was vague, there was such a pity in her face and voice that the tears rose to my eyes. She bent down and kissed me. "It would be kinder in you," she went on, "to let him stay here for a while."

"I thought," said Mr. Fairholt, nervously interlacing his fingers and snatching them apart, "that you accepted the compromise. It is no compromise unless he goes at once."

My aunt rose, taking my hand in hers. "Will you leave me," she asked, "to select a school?"

"We can discuss that together," he answered.

"Very good," replied my aunt, and so led me from the room and into my own bed-chamber,

where we found Sally, making a great pretence of dusting and arranging.

"Would you mind saying what's been done, ma'am?" asked Sally, turning round with a duster in her hand.

"Mr. Fairholt is very strongly in favour of sending the child to school. I think too that it would be the better course. We must not grow up idle and ignorant; must we, Johnny?"

I recognised this as an appeal to Sally, and answered "No" as stoutly as I could, for I saw premonitory symptoms of tears in her eyes. Notwithstanding the stoutness of my answer, the tears came.

"Oh, ma'am," cried Sally, "I can't let him go."

"Now, Troman," said Aunt Bertha, "you mustn't be ridiculous."

"No, ma'am," assented Sally, amenable to discipline.

"He will not go far away, and we will make arrangements to let you see him as often as you can."

"Couldn't I go with him, ma'am?" said Sally. "Couldn't I take a situation in the school?"

"I think you had better stay with us, Troman," said my aunt, smiling. "It is scarcely likely that a school can afford to keep a domestic servant for every pupil. He will probably go to school in Wrethedale, which is very close at hand; and you will be able to see him as often as once a

week. And then, you know," said my aunt, humouring Sally, "we shall have him coming back quite a young gentleman."

Sally brightened a little at these fairer promises, and wiped her eyes. At the sound of hoofs in the carriage-drive below, I looked through the window, and saw Mr. Fairholt in the act of mounting a horse held by the groom. Aunt Bertha also looked out, and seeing what I saw, shrugged her shoulders a little. She left me with Sally a moment afterwards, and that good creature, as was her wont on all disturbed occasions, moistened me with her tears. She emptied upon me, as a guard against possible starvation in my as yet unfixed new quarters, the sum of two shillings and three-pence half-penny in copper. She also gave me a thimble, of which she instructed me to take especial care, since its continued possession betokened "luck." Then she sat down on the floor and took me in her arms, and grew cheerful, and we had a long, long talk together. I opened my heart to Sally then, as always. I had been very shy about my passion; but I told her with a serious fervour, which I have not felt often since, that I meant to come back a great man and marry Polly. Sally was as much delighted at this protestation as I at her delight, and received it with the utmost enthusiasm. We talked the matter over until I verily believe that Sally was as strongly infected as myself, and accepted it in her simple

faith as earnestly as though I had been five-and-twenty, and had propounded it in all manly seriousness.

"And I shall be a man soon; sha'n't I, Sally?"

"Yes," said Sally, rocking delightedly to and fro, and beaming on me in her happiness. "Why, you're quite a man a'ready in them things!" Sally set me on my feet in order to look at me, and chuckled over me in very admiration and affection.

"Do you think, Sally," I inquired—"do you think she'll have me?"

"Why, bless the child!" cried Sally in an ecstasy, "of course she will."

Therewith she made a dart at me and embraced me, bruising my nose against the brazen presentment of a horned Dian who stared from a huge brooch in Sally's collar. That brooch was the gift of a young carpenter who was devotedly attached to her, and whose epistles—occasionally brought by a young urchin in corduroys to that old cottage in the Black Country, and inscribed not infrequently on thin pieces of smooth-planed deal—it had been one of my earliest tasks to decipher.

"And then, Johnny," said Sally, blushing and chuckling, "when you're growed a fine gentleman, and we're married, and all settled down comfortable, I'll come and keep house for you; and you shall have Bob for groom and gardener."

I promised earnestly that I would, and there the

conversation closed. I heard Mr. Fairholt's voice below, and thought how soon he had returned. But the time had gone quickly during my talk with Sally, and he hour for tea had arrived. It was already dusk, and before tea was over had grown quite dark. I was not as a rule allowed downstairs after dark; but impelled by what childish vagary I scarcely knew, I stole down the stairs and through the hall and on the damp lawn. I ran across with a sense of fear upon me, looked over the bridge into the darkness, and heard the hurrying river moan below. The voice of the night frightened me, and I retraced my steps quickly. The hall beyond the open door lay in black darkness, and some one bearing a lamp appeared so suddenly within it, that the quick and unexpected advent of the light came like a blow upon my eyes. The bearer of the lamp was Mr. Fairholt. He caught sight of me as I stood with one foot upon the doorstep, and beckoned me. I went timidly towards him.

"Bertha!" he called.

My aunt came from Mr. Fairholt's room, and I saw that she looked grave and troubled.

"I had forgotten," said Mr. Fairholt, hurriedly and nervously. "I have made arrangements for him. He goes on Thursday." He drew a card from his pocket, and read it by the light of the lamp: "'The Rev. Charles Davies, The Grove, Wrethedale.' At six o'clock. Have things ready as soon as possible, and see that he goes. I will be back

as soon as I can. If I have good news I will let you know."

"Do not keep me in suspense in any case, Robert," said Aunt Bertha.

"You shall hear as soon as possible," he answered.

"Have you everything you want?" asked Aunt Bertha.

"Yes, yes," he responded irritably. He struggled into a greatcoat, and paced in his own excited fashion up and down the hall. I heard a sound of wheels upon the drive, and the lamps of the dog-cart gleamed through the darkness. Mr. Fairholt put on his hat and went out. The groom came in, and took away a portmanteau and a travelling-rug. Aunt Bertha went to the door and called to Mr. Fairholt. He returned, and she said something to him which I did not hear. I had not observed his face till now; but as she stood aside, with her hand upon the door, it came upon me suddenly, with a horror I can scarcely name—in every lineament, and in its tone of awful pallor—with its haggard eyes and updrawn lip and gleaming teeth, the ghastly face I saw a month ago. In another second it was gone, and the door was closed. I passed upstairs, and from then until bedtime suffered unspeakable nervous terrors at every movement of the bare trees outside; at every gurgle of the river, which ran noisily, being swollen with late rains; at every creak of the door

or rustle behind the wainscot, and the fall of every cinder from the dying fire. But being once put to bed, I fell asleep with the pressure of Sally's loving hand still on my cheek, and slept without a dream.

For the next day or two Sally scarcely allowed me to stray beyond her sight. She followed me about like the proverbial hen who finds that she has a duckling for a chicken, and discovers that the scarce-fledged creature is bent on taking to the water. Polly and I had a long and favourable interview on the fatal Thursday afternoon. She had been all majesty in the morning—a gracious majesty I must confess—frequently waving me from my corner—for it was a holiday, and there were no lessons from Aunt Bertha—to bid the humble *jongleur* recite her favourite stories. At table her majesty was pensive. On the removal of the cloth, she cried, and after a little while retired from the nursery to indulge a royal sulk in private. This over, she reappeared, imperiously and without apparent provocation kissed me, and then rang the bell. This was an act prohibited by authority under heavy penalties, except in cases of great emergency. Sally appeared in answer to the call. Her majesty, whose eyes were still moist, flounced round upon her.

"T'oman," said her majesty, "I tan't spare him. Tell Aunty Bertha he s'an't go." With this

edict she resumed her throne, and set resolutely to work upon a paper dragon.

Sally shook her head. "They're gettin' Master Johnny's things ready now, Miss Mary."

"I don't care," returned her majesty, with a wave of the scissors; "I tan't spare him."

"Very well, miss," said Sally, and went away again.

Childhood sails a tiny craft, upon a very little pool indeed. But the shallows of that little pool are deeps to the child. The little waves that wimple at the edge are breakers. The child-craft suffers wreck as disastrous, or finds passage as happy, as the great merchantman that goes down in the depths, or is brought by fair winds to the desired haven. And I suppose that I was as sincerely joyful at the issue of Polly's childish ukase as I have ever been at anything. I was persuaded that her judgment was final. Her manner carried conviction. She was so convinced herself, that in me a doubt would have been an unpardonable presumption. So for another hour or two, beneath calm skies and over pleasant seas, went the barque of Childhood's Hope with a steady breeze abeam. But at four o'clock Aunt Bertha came upon the scene as cloud-compeller. The horizon darkened—the deeps yawned—the vessel foundered. To drop the metaphor: I was carried away and dressed, undergoing that operation in a condition of mind of the most concentrated misery. To take up the

metaphor again: I went down with the shriek of the tempest in my ears. A furious little tempest she was indeed, though rapidly silenced by the cloud-compeller, and put to bed, like other tempests, with repentant moans.

The blazing eyes of the dog-cart were at the door again. I had taken leave of Sally, and was saying good-bye to Aunt Bertha, when a hoarse voice called from the gate of the eastern bridge, and the groom went crunching down the gravel drive. Aunt Bertha stood and listened, with her hands upon my shoulders. I can see now the kindly stooping attitude change suddenly to one of listening fear, the stoop remaining, but its whole expression changed. I can see now the kindly look, which vanished as though a hand had passed across her face and smoothed it out, and left a look of waiting terror there. The groom came crunching back again, and behind him came a hackney carriage, the horse in the shafts limping painfully, and throwing off a great cloud of steam. From the carriage came Mr. Fairholt. At the first sight of his face, Aunt Bertha started upright, ran to him, and took him by the hands. He put her away feebly and impatiently, and entering, sank into a chair in the hall. Aunt Bertha bent above him with an air of great anxiety. He shook his head in a slow, dazed way from side to side.

"He is gone," he said—"gone without a trace. Has been gone for nearly five weeks."

"Robert!" said Aunt Bertha, and put an arm about his neck.

He rose to his feet, setting her arm aside, and looked round with his grey face drawn into the semblance of that phantom which I knew so well. "Shut out those people," he said slowly. He caught sight of me, and stooping above me, patted me on the shoulder; and with a sudden attempt at cheerfulness, which was more dreadful than even the expression of his face, he said lightly, "So our little man is going to school. Well, well. Be a good little man. Good-bye."

Aunt Bertha with a backward glance at him, led me to the door. The groom lifted me into the dog-cart, and having wrapped me in a thick travelling-rug, took his place beside me and drove me away. As I looked back, I saw the lamplight gleaming through the open door, and the lame and steaming horse standing dejectedly against it.

CHAPTER VIII.

HISTORY.

At the very soul of understanding dwells charity.

FRANK, comfortably conscious of virtue, went back to Montague Gardens. There was something in the fact of having snubbed Tasker which soothed

and calmed him. Tasker was the evil spirit of impecuniosity personified, and Frank having done battle with him, felt safe from extravagance for evermore. "I am glad I insulted him"—so ran Frank's thoughts—"because I shan't be able to borrow from the beggar any more." Reaching his rooms, he threw himself at full length upon a sofa, lit a cigar, and built castles. Is there anything pleasanter in the world—so queries the poet—than to enjoy delight with liberty? Frank just then combined the joy of stern resolve with the delight of liberty from labour. Happiest of moments, when a man can persuade himself in his laziest leisure that he intends to be industrious, and can draw in advance from the Bank of Fancy the reward of his own high virtue!

"And, indeed," said Frank, drawing a miniature from his breast, and taking it into his confidence, "it would be really hard to go astray with such a guide as you are. Do you know—do you guess"—he went on in a sort of lazy rapture—"how much I love you? Do you think how I will work and hope and plan and endure for you?"

The smoke curled lightly about his head. His eyes followed it with fancies as unsubstantial. Pleasant fairy palaces, too frail for permanent human habitation, he built, and for those brief moments lived in—thinking, like the rest of us, that success is gained by dreaming of it, and that hopes will be fulfilled because he held them. Lying

there, still dreaming, after it had grown quite dusk, and the servant had brought in his lamp, he was startled—not altogether agreeably—by the entry of Hastings and two companions.

"Of what," inquired Mr. Hastings, airily removing his hat and arranging his hair before the mirror,—"of what is the young man thinking, as he dreams on his horse-hair couch? Fairholt! I am in league with the Egyptians, burning with zeal to redress the wrongs of that ancient people, who, as a man of your reading is sure to know, were spoiled of their treasure by the Hebrews. I have taken in turn for them a little revenge in passing, and have spoiled a Jew. The Jew will eventually spoil me, I know; but for the moment Fortune smiles upon the ally of the ancient Coptic race."

"What is your latest madness?" asked Frank, laughing.

"Great wits," responded Mr. Hastings with a grave flourish, "to madness often allied. I am in a gorgeous humour. Do you know—speaking with the utmost seriousness, and with as little egotism as possible—I am really convinced that I am a devil of a fellow. To-night I am in more than usual form. I have spoiled that Hebrew, not in any vulgar way, but with an airy grace which is really indicative of genius. I flattered and soothed him. I lulled him into confidence; I led him to places of sweet rest and quiet breathing;

and ultimately," concluded the young gentleman with another solemn flourish, "I landed him for ten quid; and there's the money." Throwing a loose handful of gold and silver on the table, Mr. Hastings relasped into a cheerful smile, and asked for brandy and soda.

Frank bustled about and set decanters on the table. "Who is your Hebrew?" he asked on his knees and with his head in a cupboard.

"There," replied Mr. Hastings, "you touch me in a tender part. The Egyptians and I are content with small beginnings. Finally, we shall land the Rothschilds for a million, I have no doubt. At present, we are content to ply for humbler game. I have fleshed—or shall I say fished, to make the simile completer?—my maiden hook on Tasker."

Frank, who had not been over attentive to this speech, started so at the name that he bumped his head violently against the shelf of the cupboard as he rose to his feet.

"A kindred spirit leaps to meet me," remarked Mr. Hastings languidly, and uncorked a bottle of soda-water. "League yourself with the Egyptians, Fairholt. I pledge you my solemn word of honour that the bait by which this small specimen of the land-shark was secured was my own unassisted note of hand."

"No, thank you," Frank responded. "Egypt is cleaned out already, and Christendom is under-

going a similar process now. I have had enough of Tasker."

"Do you know," said Hastings with an air of profound seriousness, "I can imagine that to the ordinary palate a very little of Tasker would be eminently cloying? The taste for Tasker is in fact acquired. To be candid, however, I can discover one virtue in him—he can occasionally be induced to part with money."

"He parts with it on very heavy terms," responded Frank, going back to the cupboard, and rummaging anew there.

"The wisdom of our ancestors," returned Hastings, "is proverbial—at least a good deal of it is. In one scrap of that wisdom for which the fogydom of past centuries is justly famous, we are told that he who intends not to pay may promise much."

Frank withdrew himself from the cupboard with a box of cigars in one hand and a bottle in the other, and answered lightly, "If you were the rascal you profess to be, you might be even a match for Tasker."

"Referring," replied Hastings in a forensic tone, and with a forensic wave of his cigar, "to the works of Thomas Babington Macaulay, I learn that the late Nicholas Macchiavelli was a highly amiable and moral person. Fortified by this judgment, I have looked up *The Prince*, and am humbly striving to carry out its precepts. My

natural bent in favour of the conventionalities of virtue is strong, and I still occasionally deviate into candour. Let me be candid now. Tasker lent me this coin wholly and solely upon your account."

"On my account?" asked Frank.

"On yours. I told him I was coming to your rooms. So far I was truthful. But now mark the Macchiavellian strain. I told him also that you had invited several other fellows. When I lie, as I frequently do, I am generally prophetic. I *am* here, with some other fellows. Since we are here, you can't do less than invite us to stay. I told him further that we were coming for a quiet little game at *vingt-et-un*. You will, I am sure, produce the cards, and oblige me by the fulfilment of that prophecy also."

"That prophecy must go unfulfilled," Frank answered.

"Let us waive that point a moment," resumed Hastings. "Your friend Tasker, anxious to oblige you, loans the money instantly. Since I am pledged to candour, I will conclude by saying that he said Tasker hates you like poison, and lent me the money in the hope that I might win, and that you might lose."

"I never quite know where to have you, Hastings," said Frank, still laughing. "But do you really mean this?"

"In my moments of candour," Hastings replied

with increased solemnity, "Truth becomes the immediate jewel of my soul. My bosom is a glass, and the workings of my heart are patent to the meanest observer. When I put up the shutters and—if I may mix a metaphor--tread in the paths of dissimulation, I acknowledge that I am inscrutable. But now the simplest son of the desert may understand and know."

"Do you mean seriously to tell me," asked Frank, "that Tasker was fool enough to express such a hope to a sieve of a fellow like you?"

"Example," responded Mr. Hastings, "is contagious. My indulgence in metaphor touches that poetic string which ever vibrates in the artist's being; and he lisps in figures, for the figures come. I had forgotten the respectable simile of the sieve, or, despite my leaning to originality, I would have used it. In my candid moments, I am even as a sieve, holding back nothing I receive. I occasionally retain—I may add as an after-thought,—a little moisture. Will you pass the brandy?"

"Was Tasker sober?"

"The worthy Tasker reeled—his victor's sport, and ere I left him lay dissolved in port. On strict investigation—for I mark once more the Macchiavellian strain—I find that quotation scarcely apt. Tasker remained so far solid as to be able to convey himself to the club door, whence he departed in a cabriolet, and a cloud of curses."

One of Mr. Hastings's companions, who an-

swered to the name of Bonder, and had evidently been out dining somewhere, bearing the evidences not only in his white tie and ample shirt-front, but in his flushed and lazy face, fell off his chair in helpless laughter at this statement. Hastings surveyed him with a solemn countenance; and turning to the other, who answered to the name of Brookes, and had also been out dining somewhere, and also bore about him the evidences of that fact in his white tie and ample shirt-front, and in his flushed and lazy face, opined that this game of *vingt-et-un* would have to be confined to three. On this Mr. Bonder checked his raptures, and rising to his feet, proclaimed himself as sober as a judge and fit for anything.

"The sobriety of a judge," said Hastings, resuming the forensic air, "depends, as it occurs to me, upon the nature of his lordship's head and the quantity of liquor his lordship may imbibe. This is a proposition so self-evident that, but for the laxity of my friend Bonder's speech, I would not have ventured upon it."

Mr. Bonder laughed again, and asked Frank for the cards.

"Well," said Frank, "it would be too inhospitable to turn you fellows out. But I won't play cards, and I won't see cards played here."

"Dost thou think," demanded Hastings, "that because thou art virtuous there shall be no more cakes and ale?"

"Come, come," returned Frank. "You can spend the evening capitally without falling into this eternal play. Honestly, *I* have come to the conclusion to give it up. I play no more."

"His pipe is silent in the vale," Hastings declaimed with tragic emphasis.

"Now, you know," said Mr. Bonder, looking round, and gasping helplessly, "that's uncommon fine. By—by—by Jingo, sir, that's good—that's uncommon good!"

"Your appreciation, Bonder," replied Hastings, "of my humble efforts to please is not unvalued." He said it with so serious a countenance that Bonder fell off his chair again, and was recommended by Brookes, the self-controlled, to go home if he couldn't behave himself.

"But," gasped Mr. Bonder, feebly struggling into his seat, "he's so uncommon rich, you know. Upon my soul," said Mr. Bonder, brightening up as though he hailed a discovery, "I can't help laughing at him."

"Let him laugh who wins," said Hastings. "Mine host, the cards, and a flagon of thy rosiest. If you choose to cultivate the ascetic virtues, I am not the man to say you nay. Common courtesy demands that in your own chambers you should be permitted by your guests to adopt what *rôle* you please. But you will allow me to point out that the calls of hospitality are urgent, and

that your guests desire to season life with a little innocuous excitement."

"If you *will* play," said Frank, rising with evident unwillingness, "I suppose you must. Here are the cards. Amuse yourselves."

The three drew near the table. Frank, lighting a new cigar, left the room, took his hat, and strolled into the gardens of the square. Mr. Bonder, in his present condition, was of opinion that "this was the richest joke he had seen for ages." Mr. Brookes, on the contrary, grew solemn at the host's departure. Hastings underwent no change, but remained the same gay, reckless, flippant creature, lost his money with an easy grace, and borrowed it back again, only to re-lose it. The three played for stakes which, considering their means, were ridiculously high, and became so absorbed in the game as to lose all memory of Frank, though remaining keenly alive to the presence of his decanters. Frank, meanwhile marching to and fro in the square gardens, congratulated himself upon his firmness. It would have been considered "bad form" in the set in which Frank moved to object to an invasion of this kind, however insolently made; and Hastings was so old a friend, and Brookes and Bonder were such good fellows in their way, that anger would have been absurdly out of place.

"Now, really," said Frank, in communion with himself, "I should have liked to play with those

fellows—I should really have liked it. I never said a word about it to you, my darling, in your hearing, but I promised it to you all the same. I have surrendered these old ways—I have done with them for ever. How could I be untrue to you, or untrue to the better hopes you wake within me? Through you I can be my best—a poor creature even then, I fear—but better, oh, how much better than you found me!"

The moon shone brightly. Frank was in the very centre of the gardens, and quite alone. He drew the miniature from his breast and kissed it again and again. He looked at it—and dimly as he saw it in that dim light—he dwelt on the sweet face with a yearning love and worship. His heart rejoiced within him as he thought he had escaped to moments so sweet, from that smoke-clouded room and that flippant converse. Following that tract of the railway field by field and landmark by landmark, his spirit seemed to wing its way home, past the pleasant summer river, and past the moonlit fields to the park, and through it to the gardens—to the gate where he felt, by an intuition of spirit so strong that he almost knew it must be true, that Maud was standing and thinking of him, with such a love and such a tender yearning. Ay! how he thrilled at the thought! How sweet and dear the fancy seemed! He was all but bodily present with her. His whole heart melted and glowed as he stood there.

The highest rapture fails the soonest. Frank came back to himself. The moon was clouded and the night seemed chilly. He tried to project himself again; but Passion would not not be whipped and spurred. It lay quiescent and made no answer. So Frank wandered indoors a litte disconsolate, and the peal of laughter which came to him as he stood in the doorway was welcome. Hastings at the moment of Frank's entrance was walking gravely round his chair for luck; and since everything which Hastings chose to say or do was full of infinite jest for those young fellows, the Messrs. Brookes and Bonder, the solemn performance was provocative of much loud merriment.

Hastings with a face of the intensest gloom, and the voice and action of a transpontine Othello, accosted Frank: "Behold the irony of Fate! Rich with barbaric Tasker's spoils, fed fat with the booty of Irsael, I enter these gilded halls. Now, how am I dwindled! For the second time I am on my last half-quid, and the boaster hath boasted himself in vain. But—thrice the magic circle wind." Therewith Mr. Hastings completed his journey round the chair and resumed his cards.

Frank seated himself at the table and watched the game. The cards ran in favour of Hastings, and in a quarter of an hour that young gentleman had quite a pile of gold and silver beside him.

"A star has set, a star has risen," he quoted

oracularly; and turning, addressed Fairholt: "Sit down and take a hand, like a Christian. Behold" —spreading his money gravely about the table— "behold the booty of my bow and my spear! I dare thee to the joust, thou Paynim knight! Couch, couch thy lance, and gird thee for the fight."

"I don't care about it," Frank responded.

If the discerning reader has anything of the gambling spirit, and has ever looked on at a game of chance, not purposing to join in it, he knows how dangerous it is. If the discerning reader knows anything of human nature, he will have observed that there is a kind of man in whom the very fervour of resolve breeds weakness. For such a man to resolve is more exhausting than it is to man of strong will to act out a resolution. Frank's passionate longing after virtue had left him weakened for its defence. There are many men so constituted, unhappily for themselves. They are mostly souls capable of very ardent longings and very bitter remorses. Their virtue—such as it is —consists in a passionate and spasmodic longing after virtue. Their remorse, until such time as they grow case-hardened, is very terrible; their self-upbraidings and their self-humiliations are very pitiful.

I do not wish in my character of stage-manager to come too often before the curtain to take my marionnettes to pieces. I would prefer that

you should learn from their antics and from those simulated speeches which come to them from the wings—and seem to you to come from them—what manner of puppets they are, and what manner of men and women they are meant to stand for. But I wish to come forward with such apologies as may seem needful, to ask your favour on behalf of the puppet Frank. There are some opinions which it is always well to hold about other people, and never wise to hold about ourselves. You sir, shall, if you please, judge me with lenity. When I tumble, you shall be pitiful. When I fail, going back from my promises, revoking my solemn pledges, and breaking down your kindly hopes of me, you shall not be scornful. When I see you trip, I promise not to smile. I pledge myself, when you are at your worst and your stupidest, to think of you gently and hopefully. It is well for a man—it is wise, and good, and gracious in him to be scant in excuse for himself, and plenteous in excuse for others. And I ask you to follow this young fellow's tragic story in this mood. For the fictionist has missed his purpose altogether unless a kindly heart go through his pages with him, and unless the shadows he would pass off for men and women meet, at the hands of those for whom they were created, some such kindliness of welcome, some such gentle sympathies and hopes, as they would have a right to claim if they were as real as they pretend to be.

There was once upon a time a philosophic

king who knew this world and its ways pretty thoroughly. His philosophy and poetry—for like all true philosophers he was a poet, and like all true poets a philosopher—are buried in an old book which nobody pays much heed to nowadays. His name was Solomon. If you choose to search, you may find his works, done into tolerable English, in a considerable number of what used to be the public buildings of this country. He is worth study, if only for his knowledge of that vast human family whom he describes as the sons and daughters of folly. That old Hebrew king knew a fool more thoroughly, knew his nature better than any other writer whose works you are likely to chance upon. And in all seriousness, I am disposed to think that Solomon knew the fool so well chiefly from introspection. Each man is in part every other man. The large nature of the Hebrew potentate had room for much folly in it; but his understanding was able to separate the elements of which he was himself compact. He set himself to know much folly and wisdom. He sat in the majesty of his kingly intellect, and analysed that Solomon and knew him—as well as Shakspeare knew us all. There is a touch of self-upbraiding in one of the king's utterances, when he says that though you bray a fool in a mortar among bruised wheat with a pestle, yet will not his folly depart from him. I suppose he knew that of himself, and wrote it in the bitterness of his heart.

At the very soul of understanding dwells charity. It is an old truth, but none the less worth writing on that account, that knowledge implies sympathy. If I show you here a man whose hopes are lofty, yet for ever draggled in the mire of failure; whose aims are all born pure, yet always sullied with the smoke of low desires; who with every wish to be generous, is in all things intensely selfish; whose nature perpetually sins against itself, whose life is wrecked by a series of sinful follies, so patently sinful and so openly foolish that a wayfaring man, though a fool, might escape them easily; and if in spite of all this, I try to show a man not wholly hopeless or completely lost, I will ask you not to throw me aside too readily as a milk-and-water optimist, but to bring to the understanding of this creature who is, in a sense, the likeness of us all, some memory of your own weakness and your own failure, some sense of the difference which exists between that godlike, possible, ideal *you*, which you do somewhere cherish and hope for and believe in, and the man you know who lives sinfully and foolishly in the place of that ideal.

At an hour so late that half London would have called it early, Messrs. Hastings, Brookes, and Bonder emerged from Frank's rooms and made night vocal. At ten o'clock Frank awoke to find the daylight pouring in dusty streaks through the

Venetian blind, the floor strewn with cigar-ashes and ends of cigars, the table covered with soiled cards and money and empty bottles, and glasses topsy-turvy, and the lamp in the centre a pale offensive blot against the daylight. Languid and aching, with hot hands and a heavy head, Frank gathered himself together, and began to grope after remembrance. Bit by bit he gathered the fragments of Memory's shattered picture, and pieced them together. Did he lose very heavily? he wondered. What were these? An IOU from Hastings—another from Brookes—another from Bonder. Much more than he started with, surely? Yes. At least a hundred pounds more. Frank fairly sickened.

And at that moment, pale and penitent, was the youthful Bonder standing in the paternal counting-house, and with beating heart awaiting the advent of Bonder senior. To him the honest foolish youngster made miserable confession, and after due severity of admonition was taken back to the fatherly heart and pardoned. Bonder senior could well enough afford to lose the few pounds his son ought to have paid in that morning; but the irregularity of the transaction wounded him. For ten minutes or thereabouts the expletives of Bonder senior were sad to listen to, and young Bonder positively felt his hair uncurling as they rose.

"This especial war-horse," mused Mr. Hastings, as he cooled his head against a marble mantel-

piece in his lodgings, "will no more roll his red eye and rally for the fight. I have digged a pit for my friend, and have fallen myself therein. I shall have Tasker down on me like all the daughters of the Biblical horseleech. Four months from this date there will be the Tasker to pay, and nothing to pay him with. "Why dost thou whet thy knife so savagely?"—"To cut the forfeit from the bankrout there." But away with unavailing sentiment!

"I sits with my toes in a brook,
And if any one asks me for why,
I hits 'em a rap with my crook;
And 'Tis sentiment kills me,' says I."

When this young party stoops to folly, and finds too late that cards betray, what art can soothe his melancholy, like a deep, deep draught of brandy-and-soda at the pub. round the corner?"

CHAPTER IX.

HISTORY.

The temptation was a strong one—the victory in its way considerable.

"WAS I a fool to act as I did?" Will Fairholt asked of himself as he hung over the bridge with a cigar in his mouth and dropped pebbles into

the river. "If I had spoken months and months ago, she might have said 'Yes' by this time. And Frank would never have grown to care for her at all. I have wasted my chances. Had I ever any chances? Why should she care for me? I don't wonder at her caring for Frank."

Will ceased his musings for a while, and fell into a state of vacuous despondency. He found himself now and again—as people in unhappy moments do—taking a mighty interest in the most foolish trifles—speculating, for instance, as to whether that little fragment of straw would float over that ripple or float round it, or whether that or this bubble would break sooner. He felt sufficiently miserable through it all. He took nobody into confidence. He had nobody to blame. Turning from the bridge he walked disconsolately through the fields with his hands in his coat-pockets and his hat pulled moodily down over his eyes. Coming to a stile, he paused there, and fell again into soliloquy.

"I asked myself if I was a fool just now. I'm pretty sure I am. Now, let me see how this case stands. First of all, Maud and Frank are engaged. Secondly— Well, if I'm an honest man there isn't a secondly in it. No; there's no secondly. I have often said to myself that I would have this aching tooth out. I never had the resolution to pull it out myself; and now that Fate has done it for me, I can find nothing to do but moon about and

grumble, and coddle myself with little sympathies. I suppose I am ashamed of myself. I hope so. Gad! I wish something would come of that Eastern Question! I think I'd volunteer and have a slap at the Rooshans. I wonder if they'll show fight, if it should come to that; or whether they'll cave in, as the Yankees say. The only chance for your disappointed swain is battle." And Will sang with a melancholy little grin at himself:

"I'll hang my harp on a willow tree;
I'll off to the wars again."

A big baritone voice took up the song:

"For my peaceful home has no charms for me,
The battlefield no pain."

"Hillo!" eried Will, starting from his reverie, and looking up.

"Hillo!" responded the owner of the big baritone voice. "Didn't know you kept a harp in stock, Fairholt."

The owner of the baritone voice was a handsome young fellow of three or four and twenty, with a manner a little too military to be altogether gentlemanly. A little loud and ostentatious in all things was this young man. He carried a fishing-rod, and had a basket strapped across his shoulders, and his dress was aggressively suggestive of piscatorial pursuits. His hat was bespangled with flies, and his wading-boots were of the newest. He

wore a huge tawny moustache, and for the rest was clean shaven. His nose might have been the better had it had a little more at the bridge and a little less at the base; and his mouth was a trifle over-large. Nevertheless he was, as I have said already, a handsome young fellow enough. He stood some six feet high in his fishing-boots, and had the shoulders of a Hercules. He was just a thought too well set-up to be graceful, and the air of the drill-yard sat heavily on him. This was Lieutenant Hartley, heir-expectant to Hartley Park and Hartley Hall, "to lands in Kent and messuages in York," and to who shall say how many thousands in the funds.

"You are just one of the men I should have wished to see," said Will, getting over the stile and advancing to him.

"Glad to hear that. What's matter?"

"I was just speculating," said Will, "about that Eastern business."

"Most people are," responded the other, producing a meerschaum pipe and polishing it tenderly with a bit of crape.

"Will the Russians fight?" asked Will.

"Can't say, 'pon my soul."

"But what do your army fellows say about it?"

"Don't know, 'pon my soul. You see, I don't do much in that way, Fairholt. There's quite a little pile of fellows who hammer away at that

until really—don't you know?—a fellow gets sick of it."

"Well, what do these fellows say?" asked Will, again returning to the charge.

"Don't know, 'pon my soul," responded the Lieutenant, sitting down on the stump of an old tree and smoking lazily. "What yah so dead-set on the thing for?"

"If there were any chance of a fight," Will answered, sitting down on the grass beside him, "I'd join to-morrow."

"Would you, by Jove?" asked the Lieutenant languidly. "Get infernally tah'd in a fortnight. It's dullest game in the world."

"I don't think I should care about the barrack routine," Will answers. "But I should like to have a slap at Old Nicholas."

"Always thought you were a peaceful fellow."

"Well, I am bloodthirsty enough now for anything."

"There's the Guvnah," said the Lieutenant, after an idle puff or two, "knows more about that business than anybody. War with Russia affects the funds, don't you know? Old beggah knows everything about everything that affects the funds. That's his pot." The Lieutenant looked lazily about him, and continued: "Sun's too bright to-day. Can't kill anything before evening. Fish won't rise. Come and lunch?"

Suddenly flashed through Will's mind the thought of Maud. Your lover is your only true poet, and he saw her—actually saw her for the moment—with her fresh, clear face, and hazel eyes, and cool, white dress. A shaded room—cool and quiet—with here and there a stray fleck of sunlight in it. A very casket of a room, and Maud, its one jewel, shining there alone. Now Will Fairholt was not an imaginative man by nature; yet if I by means of words could show you this sweet sight one half as clearly as he, by force of fancy, for the moment saw it, I were a better artist than I am. The vision decided him, and he rose to his feet with a brisk "I will; thank you."

"What's your hurry?" asked the Lieutenant. "Hungry? Gad! now I come to think of it, so am I."

The Lieutenant was not a talkative man, and conversation somewhat languished. Will communed with himself once more. "Is this wise? I don't know. I must get away somehow. If there should be war I will be in the thick of it. It's every man's duty to help to put down a great bullying blackguard like that Nicholas. Yet I doubt," thinks Will, with a melancholy laugh at himself, "if I should have thought of the duty if things had gone otherwise with me here. That big barbarian might have eaten Turkey in peace for me, if it hadn't been—" There Will groaned, and cut down a dogrose with warlike vigour.

"Bit out o' sorts, Fairholt?" asked the Lieutenant.

"N-no," said Will, with a little uncertainty in his voice.

His military companion looked down on him with a satiric grin, and within himself commented: "Hit, by Jove, and hit hard." He said nothing, however; and Will strolled along with his hands in his pockets, and smoked in stoic silence.

"You idiot"—so in thought he apostrophised himself— "*can't* you be quiet. Need you take everybody into your confidence."

Hartley Hall— "look at it pricking a Cockney ear"— declared itself at last, and Will turned with the Lieutenant into that gentleman's own apartments for a wash before luncheon. As they emerged again upon the corridor they met Maud: as bright and sweet and fresh and innocent and happy a sight as one might wish to see. She quickened her step a little to greet Will, and shook hands with a glad cordiality. She noticed nothing especial in his shy and reserved manner; and they went downstairs side by side, she chatting gaily about some garden-party or other to which she either had gone or was going, and he fairly tingling all over at the remembrance of the innocent pressure of her hand.

Here, in the breakfast-room, was Benjamin Hartley, clad in an alarming tweed, and having a white hat on. The white hat was perched at the

back of Mr. Hartley's bald head, and he mopped his face with a yellow bandana. "By Jingo, ain't it 'ot!" said Mr. Hartley, puffing upwards at his own glowing countenance, and mopping anew. "Come to pick a bone along with us, Mr. Fairholt? Glad to see you. We shall be a-looking at you like one o' the reg'lar members o' the family, now, you know. You've heard o' this young lady and her capers, I dare say?—Let's have some iced champagne, Lieutenant. I've been a-tramping over my grounds till I'm as 'ot as Dan'l in the fiery furnace. Ain't it 'ot?"

"Infernal," says the Lieutenant.

Mr. Hartley taking off his hat, laid it upon the table and sat down. The Lieutenant rang the bell, threw the hat to the footman who appeared in answer to the summons, and requested Will to be seated. Will sat by Maud, who blushed a little still at Mr. Hartley's recent allusion. The Lieutenant calmly sabred his food and sipped his wine in silence. The old gentleman flowed on mellifluous.

"I was up in town last week, and called on that young brother o' yours, sir."

"Indeed," said Will, nothing else occurring to him to say.

"Yes, I was. He's a fine young fellow, and I'm proud of him. Now, what I like about him is, as there ain't any mistaking him for anything but what he is. He's got "Swell" wrote on him

all over. Now that's what I like to see. You can set your hat on him being a thorough-bred un directly as you set eyes on him. Now, here's the Lieutenant as won't have it all, you know, as it takes a lot o' generations to turn out that kind o' pattern. He ain't a bad sort himself—the Lieutenant—for home mannyfacter.—Now, don't you go and rile up afore company, young man. Look at him," continues the old gentleman, in a high state of self-gratulation, "as savage as if his father was a red rag an' him a bull.—He's a clever young fellow that brother of yours, sir. I found him at work up there painting a picture—a proper picture. Just to see him a-slapping it on was a wonder. It was a work of art, sir, pretty nigh as big as that door. Says he's goin' to make his fortune with it. I don't mind telling you in confidence—now don't you go and split, you know—as I've put a agent o' mine on to that picture, and told him to keep his eye on it. He's a fellow as knows all about everything, that agent, and he's down on a picture like a 'ammer, and talks about 'em like a auctioneer. I don't mean to have anything but good work on my walls. And I said to my fellow, 'I that picture's up to the mark,' I said, 'buy it, and don't boggle about the price.' I don't stint in price when I get a good article." Mr. Hartley made his statement in a tone which seemed to demand an answer; and

Will awoke from his own fancies in time to reply, "Certainly not," at a venture.

"It strikes me, you know," said Mr. Hartley, speaking with his mouth full, and fanning himself with the yellow bandana, "as one o' the best things about matrimony is, as it makes a man industrious. Now your brother's positively a-slaving. I like to see it."

Maud, sitting between Will and her uncle, directed an appealing glance to the old gentleman, who gave a hasty gulp and broke into a great guffaw of laughter. Maud blushed to the roots of her hair and dropped her eyes.

"Look yah! Guvnah!" interposed the Lieutenant. "Leave the girl alone."

Maud's blushes became if anything a little deeper. The old gentleman burst into a new shout of laughter.

"'Ow awful 'ot laughin' does make a man, to be sure.—Pass the clarrit, Lieutenant, and don't be comin' any o' your swell airs over your father. Why, you ain't eating anything, Mr. Fairholt! It's this beastly weather as knocks the appetite to pieces. Though I must confess as mine takes a good deal o' spoiling. I always *was* a good hand at a knife and fork. Why, when I was younger, I've sat down to my half-pint o' four half, and had a bit o' bread and cheese for dinner, with a onion for a relish, and I've enjoyed it as if it had been—" Here the old gentleman, directing a mis-

chievous glance towards his son, burst into a new guffaw, and found it necessary to get up and stamp about the room. After this he leaned against the mantelpiece, puffing and panting, and mopping his red face and bald head with great ardour, going off into a little explosive chuckle now and again. The Lieutenant solemnly wheeled round in his chair, and regarded him through an eyeglass. Will, slightly embarrassed, not by the father's revelations but by the Lieutenant's manner, looked seriously at his plate. Maud—forgetting her own discomfiture—was mischievously merry. The old man having chuckled and panted himself into a condition of composure, took a final mop at his countenance and resumed his seat. The Lieutenant dropped his eyeglass and took up his fork.

"I was just a-saying—" the old gentleman recommenced.

"Guvnah!" said the Lieutenant in a warning bass.

"Sir, to you," returned his father.

"Stop it!" said the Lieutenant with solemn emphasis.

The old gentleman went into another roar of laughter, and recovering from it, turned to Will: "I like to poke him up a bit. Here's a gay young flower a-springing from the soil! But *he* don't own no kin with the soil, you know. Bless your heart, he's superior to that. He don't recognise nothing earthy about *him*. And so I like to rough

him up a bit, and show him where he comes from and who he is. Not afore company, you know," added the old man with a sudden seriousness. "But afore the family, what's it matter?"

"I know where I come from," said the Lieutenant in his laziest drawl, "infernally well. Gad! I wish I didn't."

"Now, young un, young un," said the old gentleman, rising and patting him on the shoulder, "don't take it to heart too serious. I know it's a blow to your fine feelings, my boy; but you'll overlive it."

"Dessay I shall," responded the Lieutenant gloomily. "But I don't laike it."

The old gentleman, still patting the Lieutenant on the shoulder, turned and addressed Will: "Come and knock the balls about a bit, Mr. Fairholt?"

Will was just about to answer "Yes," when catching Maud's eyes, he saw her make a signal of dissent, and hesitated.

Noticing this, the old gentleman said, "Well, I don't know as it isn't pleasanter out o' doors on such a day."

"Oh, much pleasanter," said Maud. "Come into the gardens." With that she tripped away, returning in a minute with a sunshade. Mr. Hartley had already disappeared, and the Lieutenant was lounging after him when Maud returned. She placed herself at Will's side, and they went out together.

When they reached the garden, she laid a hand upon his arm, and prepared for confidential chat. Will and she had been close friends for the last five years, and were as intimate as brother and sister. The touch of her hand and the rustle of her dress beside him, her face turned up to his, the sister-like confidence in which she seemed almost to nestle by him, the serene quiet of her manner—all these things were bitter to the young man's heart—were bitter because they might have been so sweet. The broad sunlight flooded the garden—the shadows cast here and there were very cool and pleasant to the eye. The arbour in which Maud and Will sat down was deliciously shady. The distant landscape lay folded in silver haze. The swallows were astir upon the river. A little wind touched the leaves of the arbour now and again, and died. So sweet—so sweet, so framed for love the time. So fit the place for lover's whisperings. So glad the lazy summer afternoon!

For a long time after that day, when Will Fairholt thought about it, he looked upon himself with a kind of wonder, and thanked heaven that he held back the words which would have done his own conscience and his brother wrong. Let us confess that it was hard—that the temptation was a strong one—that the victory was, in its way, considerable.

"Will," said Maud, leaning across the arbour-

table, "I want to speak to you very seriously. I know I can trust you." She blushed a little, and looked the prettier for it. "I am a little anxious about Frank. When uncle came from town the other day he dropped a hint about Frank's money-matters. Uncle has things to do even now with a great many people in town, and he has found out somehow that Frank has been borrowing money. I know nothing about it beyond this—that he told me when I next saw Frank to warn him against having anything to do with a man named—Tasker, I think."

Will nodded.

"Do you know him?"

"I know of him," Will returned. "Frank was a little careless some months ago, but that is all over."

"You know," pursued Maud nervously, "that uncle is not always very delicate. He doesn't see how unkind it would be in me to speak to Frank about such a matter. And so"—poor Will went down altogether before her appealing eyes—"and so I thought I might ask you to speak for me."

"I have spoken already," Will replied; "and if Frank is at all the man I take him for—and I know that a better fellow doesn't exist—he has done with that kind of thing for ever. It's very natural, you know," pursued Will, gathering strength as he went on, "for a young fellow like Frank to be careless about money-matters, so long

as he has no definite aim in view. But now"—and there Will tried to smile—"he has an object in view, Maud, and will do better, I am sure. I had a letter from him this morning. I think I have it with me now. Yes; here it is. Listen. 'I have made up my mind finally for work and economy. For a week past I have been slaving. If I go on at my present rate I shall die a millionaire. I am spending next to nothing, and hope to be in a position to offer Maud a home in a year at the outside.' Then further on he writes again: "I paid Tasker on the day of my return and quarrelled with him of set purpose.'—So I think," said Will, putting the letter into its envelope and returning it to his pocket, "that you need have no fear."

It was not in offering this defence for his brother that he found any difficulty; but he longed, with an indescribable longing, to say how he loved and how he despaired; how impossible he felt it to be thus near and to make no sign; and then to go away somewhere for ever and bury his pain among strangers, or fight in some great cause on some far battle-field, or—*et cætera, ad libitum.* He kicked out those longings, as became a man; and they returned again and again, as became his passion.

"You need fear nothing, Maud," resumed Will, after a little silence. "I know Frank well. I am rather glad you have heard, because it will

give you the greater confidence in him afterwards. And when you see how well he can fight in a good cause, you'll not like him any the less for it, you know."

Maud rose to her feet, not caring perhaps to have the springs of love laid bare after this fashion. The old gentleman strolled up to the arbour. Will, half glad and half sorry to escape from conference with Maud, seized his opportunity, and plunged into politics.

"Fight?" said Benjamin Hartley in answer to his queries. "You mark my words, sir. There's heaps o' fellows going about as think they know a lot, trying to persuade me as the Rooshans 'll back out. Now I don't mind telling you—regarding you as one of the family—and knowing as you don't meddle in money-matters, and won't spoil my game—Now is it in confidence, mind you?"

"You may rely upon me," answered Will, a little stiffly.

"Don't rough up," said Benjamin Hartley, drawing him aside. "There'll be war in another three months. Mark my words. And I'm standing to win half a million on it. That's what I'm a-doing, Mr. Fairholt. So anyhow, I back my opinion pretty strong; don't I?"

CHAPTER X.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY.

It was a conscious smile which recognised its own charming existence.

WHY do I always think of Wrethedale as I knew it in the summer-time; and why am I quite baffled now that I try to recall it as I first saw it on that dismal winter-night? An old west-country friend of mine, hunting me up the other day, found me enwrapped in fog within two hundred yards of Temple Bar, and his very mention of the place created in these gloomy chambers a sense of sunshine and green fields. You may seek in vain for Wrethedale now. The quaint cross-timbered houses with their thatched eaves and diamonded windows have disappeared, and trim villas line the road. The lilacs bloom and the laburnum's dropping gold no longer overhang the dusty, crooked, little highway. The swinging tavern-sign has at length taken the flight which on gusty days it used to meditate of old, and the tavern has followed it. The big tree on the green—the green itself—they are as clean gone as that bygone self of mine who knew them. I sometimes feel so regretful over these changes, that I mourn for the little village as though for a friend departed.

The place is opulent and new-fangled. A line of railway with sides of bare earth intersects the lovely landscape, and shapeless bridges offend the eye. The quiet is broken by hoarse screams and pantings. Rural silence has fled from the very heart of its home, and if you would be in the country, you must leave Wrethedale behind you. I have a right to be aggrieved at all this.

In my Black Country home I had had but little chance of falling in love with Nature, whose countenance was so torn and scarified as to be scarcely lovely. Not even there, of course, could the heart of a child go without some recognition of the brightening of the sky, and the softening of the air in spring-time, some gladness in the languor of the summer afternoon, some welcome for the solemn peace of autumn skies. But here Nature wore the loveliest of faces always, and most lovingly wooed me.

My schoolmates for the first week or two were just of the average caste, exciting neither special likings nor dislikings. I discovered to my own surprise on one occasion that I could be roused to fight in self-defence; and having fought and conquered, and established my footing, lived in tolerable peace and comfort. The Reverend Charles Davies was a good little man of consumptive tendencies. He was eminently painstaking and pious, and for the rest, commonplace. A good little man who did his work dutifully according to

his lights, which were not brilliant. He had a good little wife, who coddled him and us, and spent herself wholly—the good little soul!—in kindly offices for all about her. But they are phantoms here, and have no purpose to fulfil in this story. The good little clergyman's good little wife took a natural interest in my forlorn condition. Sally's first visit was made on a Saturday afternoon, and she was admitted to see me in the schoolroom, at that time deserted by its usual occupants, who were romping and shouting to their heart's content in the gravelled ground outside. While Sally and I were in the full flow of mutual confidence, Mrs. Davies came into the schoolroom, and entered into talk with Sally, and drew from her my little history. This was a subject over which Sally always cried; and Mrs. Davies, who was not a strong-minded woman, cried a little with her, and told her she was a good kind soul, and said she would always be welcome to come and see me. I also cried a little, I remember, and was a great deal petted and generally made much of. I missed Sally heavily at first, but grew gradually reconciled, and found a friend in the manageress of our childish affairs. Life glided along smoothly enough for a while in this quiet place and under these happy auspices.

It was the first of May, and we were promised a half-holiday. The Reverend Charles and his two ushers were in the best of earthly humours;

and I, with some half-dozen others, was lazily reciting the products of Madagascar, when Mrs. Davies entered the little side class-room in which we sat and summoned her husband from the school. When he returned, as he did in a few minutes, he brought a new boy with him. "This, young gentlemen," he said, "is Master George Gascoigne.—You will learn the names of your companions, Gascoigne, by-and-by."

The new boy was a slim and pallid youth, with long golden curls and handsome blue eyes and a girlish beautiful face. He was quite self-possessed, and inclined his head towards us at this introduction. I, remembering my own awkward advent, and the painful shyness which overmastered me when the Reverend Charles delivered himself of his little set speech on the occasion of my introduction to the school, was almost awed by the pleasant and easy smile of this new-comer. The smile was a genuine bit of sunshine, and gave the face, for the moment that it dwelt there, both warmth and colour. Perhaps I mix my memories here once more, and confuse first and later impressions; but I have often thought since then, that any grown-up creature, looking at that lad's face, should have seen what great things lay within him, and how easy it might be to turn them all to evil. Any grown-up creature with the slightest faculty for observation might have gained some knowledge of the boy's character from his smile,

and having gained the knowledge, might have used it for his good. For as I knew afterwards, he was keenly susceptible to all opinions, and as ductile-hearted as a girl. But nobody saw or cared, and he, my best and dearest friend, and my worst enemy and his own, grew up; to fulfil his destiny perhaps.

I have spoken of his smile. Let me try to say what I observed in it then—child as I was—and noticed in it many a time afterwards. It was perfectly frank and spontaneous. But it was a conscious smile, which recognized its own charming existence, and recognised your appreciation of it; and in its pleasure in itself, and in your pleasure at it, lived a little moment longer than it would otherwise have done. It captivated me at once, I know; and that afterlight in the face which seemed to recognise my sensation and to gladden in it, was sweeter than the smile itself. He was five years older than I, and was tall for his age. It was significant of the best and the worst of him that he signalled me out for friendship from the rest. It was significant of the best of him, because he was always kindly to the weak, and disposed to cheer such as were alone. It was significant of his worst, because half of all he did was done for the sake of admiration and applause, and because he chose me mainly for my unreasoning worship.

The fashion after which the Reverend Charles

Davies treated his pupils to a half-holiday was about as significant of him as the term by which our small diversion was known was significant of it. The pupils were duly marshalled in orderly military fashion, were told off by fours, wheeled into fours, and solemnly marched through some three or four miles of country road, which led nowhere in particular, except that the circuitous windings of our march always landed us at the school-gates. I had already made one in three of these stiff and monotonous excursions, and looked forward with no great joy to the fourth. Yet, as became the first of May—which is not always so sweetly smiling as in justice to its poetic fame it should be—the fields were thick with flowers, the hedges were already giving sign of that fair bloom which bears the name of the month it owes its life to, the skies were clear, the wind was fresh and balmy, and things generally were vastly more inviting to the school-boy soul outside the school than in it. Even in one of those foolish rows of four, it was possible to taste the sweetness of the air. Even if forbidden to dash at large through those lush fields, one could look at them. There was a certain jolly old blackbird who, in the course of our last walk, had followed us, and taunted us melodiously with our want of freedom, along a good quarter of a mile of road, keeping himself carefully behind the hedge meanwhile. Surely *his* society was worth something, though one shared

it as a close-bound unit in fifteen monotonous rows of four.

We were all marshalled in the playground and arranged in order, when the Reverend Charles emerged from the house accompanied by Gascoigne. We stood there in solemn row, whilst the meek little clergyman walked along the rank, and inspected us front and rear, like a general among troops on a review day. Gascoigne followed him; and when the little man had completed his inspection and had come round to our front again, the new boy slipped his hand into the master's, and stood there by his side. The Reverend Charles looked down upon him with an air of rebuke, as I fancied, but Gascoigne met his glance with a smile, and the small man patted him on the shoulder, and smiled in return.

"With whom will you walk, Gascoigne?" asked the Reverend Charles. "You may choose your own companion for to-day."

It was a little thing, perhaps, but it won my heart at once. Gascoigne left the master's side and took his place by me, and touched me lightly on the shoulder. It was a little thing, but I had been busy with fancies concerning him, in my imaginative, childish way, and he was so much older, and stronger, and taller, and handsomer than I; and altogether, as I have said, the action won my heart. I looked up at him with a shy gratitude, and he looked back upon me with that splendid aspect of affec-

tionate protection which I learned afterwards to know so well, and to take so much delight in. Our ways are differently ordered now, and wide apart, but if I could undo the past—his past and mine—and stand beside him again with that unquestioning acceptance of his worth, how gladly I would do it!

We were the chief institution of Wrethedale, and the village was proud of us. It is just possible that we robbed here and there a garden now and then, and that we were upon occasion a nuisance. But on these public days of holiday, the village turned out and audibly admired us; and one or two of the oldest of Wrethedale's inhabitants used to bid God bless us as we passed. They were unused to processions in Wrethedale, and a very small show excited the good folk's emotions. So we tramped with fair regularity of step through the winding village street. The smith and the landlord of the *Wrethedale Arms* took off their caps to the cottage doors. The children ran after us, and before us, and beside us, and turning suddenly round upon us, stared shyly, and ran on again. The wagoner, gay in honour of the sweet month's advent, touched his tanned forehead as we filed past him, and drew his ribboned team aside to let us go by in unbroken order. The road was firm beneath our feet, and neither damp nor dusty. The hedges were green on either side; and now and again, where a gate broke in upon the hedge-row, we had glimpses of the pleasant western

country right or left. The birds were with us from the very beginning of our march; and, at the sight of so much youth and pleasure, sang their best and cheeriest.

I suppose the May weather touched the juvenility which was certainly still vital in him somewhere, for just as we reached Old Bunn's strawberry gardens—a favourite resort of the people of the little country-town hard by—the Reverend Charles halted and addressed us. "Young gentlemen," said the Reverend Charles, "you may now walk out of rank."

There was a rush and a yell. The mob of young gentlemen went headlong down the lane.

Let me recall the place and the time. Beyond Old Bunn's gardens ran three or four cottages, each with its pleasant little plot in front. On the opposite side of the lane, a pond full of elderly tadpoles, and young frogs, and strange creatures neither old tadpole nor young frog, but in various intermediate conditions. I remember them because of Gascoigne's lecture. Then beyond the pool a gate, over which one mild young heifer pushed an inquiring head, as if to ask what all the noise was about. Beyond that a barn at a corner of the highway, all ivy from base to roof, except for the great oak doors. Beyond the barn a dense mass of willows, white in the May-day wind. And over all the May-day sunshine, and the sense of liberty, and the freshness of the

spring; and over even these the exultant gladness of the school-boy heart. Round the corner to the left, hidden until now by the thick-leaved hedges, an old farmhouse—rackety, tumble-down, picturesque. A broken gate opening on a littered fowl-yard. To the right that dense mass of willows, white in the May-day wind, feathering off gradually, with glimpses of the country between. And then a sudden swerve, and a brook with a fallen sapling across it, making its silver wavelets brawl a little; and beyond the hay-meadow on the other side, such a stretch of country as you may seek in vain elsewhere. And over all the May-day sunshine, and the sense of liberty, and the freshness of the spring; and over even these the exultant gladness of the school-boy heart.

I write this after midnight, on a cold March night. The sound of London's latest traffic is in my ears. A market-cart goes rumbling towards Covent Garden. Yet a minute ago I was back in those glad fields. The brook rippled and the birds sang again. My old schoolfellows were calling one another round about me. My new friend was by my side. I shall take his hand no more; but, O Gascoigne, before I lay my pen down for the night, let me sit awhile and fancy that you too are back in those old scenes, and that you think of them and of all the broken history which followed them with such repentance as matches my forgiveness.

I dwell upon that day because it belongs to

him, and has grown for me to be a part of him. We spent the whole afternoon together, and he charmed me. Even in those early days he charmed everybody, and exercised a subtle influence over all with whom he came in contact. Below the fallen sapling an old wooden baulk ran across the brook, accompanied half-way by a decrepit hand-rail, which failed just where it might have begun to be service. At the far end of this baulk rose a magnificent elm, which overshadowed the water, and mixed its boughs with those of the willows on the near side. The Reverend Charles had given up his scholars for the moment, and had resigned himself to the situation. He was peacefully walking along the road which ran by the brook-side. He had his hands folded behind him, and his hat very much at the back of his head, and he was evidently giving up his good little heart to the serene enjoyment of nature. Gascoigne pointed to him laughingly, and fell into so ludicrously accurate an imitation of his gait that I laughed in return. Mimicry I soon discovered was one of Gascoigne's special faculties. We sat down on the baulk together at the water's edge, and fell into conversation. To speak more accurately, Gascoigne cross-examined me and drew me out, and most skilfully and pleasantly manipulated me.

"You and I," he said, "are going to be friends. What's your name?"

I told him.

"I shall call you Jack."

I was really honoured beyond measure. I told him my little story. I described Sally and the little Black Country cottage; and told him of the young carpenter, and of Aunt Bertha and Mr. Fairholt and Uncle Will and Polly. There was a feeling of freshness and even a little feeling of daring in making these revelations to a stranger. He had put his arm about my neck with a caressing protection which was natural to him, and as he had said, we were friends. I quite despair of conveying to any reader who may not have a similar remembrance the strength and rapidity with which my affection for him and my admiration of him took root and grew. He listened with such an unaffected pleasure; he questioned with so delicate and natural a tact, and with such a kindly interest, that my story was told quite easily and without embarrassment.

He returned my confidence, and told me all about himself. I gathered as the result of it that his parents were not wealthy, but that he was an only child, and had great expectations from somebody, who meant to send him to college and to make a man of him. He told me that he meant to be a clergyman. "Like Mr. Davies?" I ventured to ask him. "No," he answered laughingly; "not at all like Mr. Davies."

Then we left the brook and wandered back a little, and he told me all about the frog and tad-

pole metamorphosis. We gathered wild-flowers, and he knew the names of all—the scientific names of some. His father, he told me then, was a scientific man, and amazingly clever. He had written books, and knew a great deal more than Mr. Davies. This last in answer to my queries. Then he led me on to literature, and listened with a smiling, friendly interest while he drew me out on that point. One of his chief charms then and always was that he had in perfection the art of putting an inferior at ease. In after-days, when his wish was fulfilled and he took his first curacy, I have seen him exercise that art with farmers and farm-labourers and the dull mechanics of the village. They were all charmed with him, as indeed how could they have been otherwise?

Our talk went on until the Reverend Charles had gathered his strayed flock together, and was continued as we marched in military order home. He gave me a lift over a rough bit of Valpe—on whose mazes I had just entered—that evening; the first of many. To my infinite delight he took the spare bed in the room I slept in. Circumstances conspired in favour of our friendship. School-hours parted us of course, for he was far ahead of me, as was only natnral. But in the play-ground we came together again, and in those games in which I was unable to join I had at least the satisfaction of seeing him outshine all our companions. He was an Admirable Crichton, and

as good as he was clever and handsome. Some of the meaner spirits envied him; but even Envy was shortly silenced. He took and kept a place among us from the first, which seemed to have been either reserved or created for him, and in our young republic he was president. His popularity never weaned him from me. From the promise made on the first afternoon of our acquaintance he never deviated. We were friends.

The holidays came at last, and with the groom came Sally to escort me home. Gascoigne and she had grown to know each other long before this, of course. Sally was in love with him; and he, as much for her own sake as for mine, was quite impressed with Sally. We parted most affectionately, and met again much sooner than we had hoped. For it turned out that Gascoigne's father was an old friend of Mr. Fairholt's, and that after having left him unvisited for many years, as old friends will, he came over one day in the first week of the holidays, bringing Gascoigne with him. I was by this time—the first shyness of our reunion having disappeared—reinstalled as *jongleur,* and Polly had again assumed her regal state. A wild legend, into which Gascoigne was pitchforked as knight-deliverer, and which I regret to say was afterwards imperiously set aside by Polly in favour "The Three Bears," was interrupted by Sally, who ran up to tell me that Gascoigne had arrived. I blush to admit that love and fealty were alike

forgotten for the moment, and that I fell precipitately down stairs to greet my friend, leaving Polly lonely with that weird and incompleted legend.

The house and its inmates alike seemed changed since that misty winter-night on which I had left for school. Mr. Fairholt, who never noticed me, went about in a slow, listless, broken way. Uncle Will was less cheerful than of old; and a settled melancholy had fallen on Aunt Bertha. Even Sally was saddened in some way that I could not understand. When I reached the hall, Mr. Fairholt was greeting his guest, and Aunt Bertha was talking to Gascoigne. Uncle Will entered at the same moment, and with a momentary cheerfulness took my companion and myself in charge, and showed Gascoigne the stables and the dogs. When we returned to the house we found that it had been arranged that the visitors should stay until the following evening, and Gascoigne and I settled thereupon to talk. In the midst of it I remembered Polly, whom I straightway produced and introduced. He took her up in his arms and kissed her—a proceeding at which she feigned to be displeased. She overlooked Gascoigne's error shortly afterwards, and trotted after him everywhere, with a wondering admiration of the things he did, and an admiring wonder at him, which satisfied me completely.

In consideration of Gascoigne's presence, I was allowed to sit up a little later than usual. We sat together as it grew dusk in the little room

commonly used by Aunt Bertha, and I was relating the story of the first appearance of the face. Gascoigne had his arm about my neck as usual, and I was looking up at him as I spoke, when I noticed that he had ceased to listen, and was peering into the dusk with a somewhat alarmed expression. I stopped; and he pointed through the window, asking in a whisper, "Jack, what's that?"

I looked out also, and saw the figure of a man, who came silently and with a stealthy crouching run across the lawn. I was just about to cry out in fear when I recognised the crouching figure as that of Uncle Will. But almost before I was assured of this I was again frightened. A hand was laid upon the window sill, and a head slowly rose above it. The head turned from side to side, as if in suspicious watchfulness.

"A burglar!" whispered Gascoigne.

Uncle Will came nearer with a slower step and with still greater caution, until he was near enough to lay a sudden hand upon the shoulder of the man who crouched beneath the window. At the touch the man startled to his feet, and I fell back from Gascoigne's hold with a shriek. "The face!" Horrified as I was by this sudden apparition of my phantom, I saw all that happened outside and heard the one word spoken. All that happened was that my phantom, turning round, threw his hands upwards and backwards and recoiled. In a flash of time he recovered himself and fled, and

melted like a shadow in the shadows of the night. Uncle Will's first gesture was the same. He also recoiled with his hands thrown back and up, and so for the merest fragment of a second they faced each other. As my phantom turned to fly, the other precipitated himself towards him as if to seize him. He was too late, and lost his footing. Recovering himself, he followed that flying shadow with a cry:

"Frank!"

CHAPTER XI.

HISTORY.

A good safe vengeance in the way of business.

MR. TASKER, seated at his table in his own private room in Acre Buildings, communed with himself. No great amount of Mr. Tasker's energies were at any time absorbed by the actual transaction of business. The spider's little affair with the fly is rather a matter of pleasure than of business—to the spider. It is in the spinning of his web that that wary insect expends his powers. So it was with Mr. Tasker. At this time he was spinning most warily, and he did his work with a relish also. It was a pleasant summer afternoon. Acre Buildings were so far back from the main thoroughfare that the hum of traffic came soothingly and pleasantly upon the ear. The sparrows chattered

about the roof and in the trees and on the pavement. Things had a rural look and sound and scents thereabouts. There was a long box of mignonette on the ledge of Mr. Tasker's window. That window was open, and the exquisite perfume of the flower filled the apartment. The sunlight fell in broken flecks upon the floor and danced on the roof, reflected thither by a carafe of water which Mr. Tasker had just laid down. A glass of brandy-and-water stood at his elbow. He held a big Havana between his finger and thumb, and lost in reverie, forgot to light it.

"We shall see," said Mr. Tasker with his pleasant smile. He roused himself, lit his cigar, placed his feet upon the table, and with the tumbler in his hand, lolled there, a picture of careless ease. Yet the brain of Mr. Tasker was busy, and its theme was vengeance. Not vengeance after any tragic fashion, for to such height Tasker was too prudent to rise, having a soul to save and a neck to take care of; but vengeance in a good, safe, usurious, profitable way, and in the way of business. And his thought was, "Can I get Mr. Frank Fairholt in my hands again, and grind him down, and make him ask for time, and flout him and expose him to his friends?" The answer just then to this amiable inquiry was "Yes;" and Mr. Tasker evolved his plans, and enjoyed his victory in anticipation. Those outspoken allusions to Shylock and his pound of flesh rankled in Mr. Tasker's mind.

They were displeasing allusions, apart from their personal application, because they bespoke a good game played in vain—a checkmate to a compatriot. Tasker, half enveloped in smoke, looked through the window into the thick-leaved branches of the nearest tree with half-closed eyes, and sipped his liquor relishingly. A note lay upon the table, and Tasker dug at it with his heel as he leaned back there. "You shall help me," said he with a chuckle. "And I will throw you both into the same boat, and you shall both row to the devil." He lay back again and chuckled enjoyingly over his own reflections; then sipped again and resumed his cigar. "He is not at all better than a fool," he continued, following out his own train of thought —"he is not at all better than a fool, that Hastings. I shall use him as I like when he comes here. We shall see—we shall see."

At this moment Tasker's boy knocked at the door and announced a visitor. Tasker took his feet from the table, and turned round to welcome, with a nod of the head and a left hand outstretched sideways, Mr. Hastings. That young gentleman sauntered in languidly, and put a little finger into the proffered hand. "And how is Egypt, my chosen Israelite?" he asked, seating himself on the table.

"Egypt is fat and well and flourishing," responded Mr. Tasker with a gay good-humour.

"Is Israel well and fat and flourishing?" asked Hastings.

"Pretty well—pretty well," answered Tasker, in the best of tempers and the most charming of good spirits.

"Pretty well is very well," the other responded, with a solemn langour of manner. "I'll take a weed, Tasker. Yours are always good, I know. —Thank you."

"You have come," said Mr. Tasker, smilingly holding forth his cigar-case, and speaking with that little effort to be clear and sharp about his *C*'s and *S*'s, which showed him most keenly watchful of himself—"you have come most punctually. You are here to time, Mr. Hastings, like a clock."

"I am here punctually, as you observe," returned Hastings, lighting his cigar, and speaking leisurely as he does so. "I am, I regret to say, less like a clock than a clock-case—empty."

Tasker was in admirable spirits. "You will have your little choke, Mr. Hastings."

"I deserve my little choke," said Hastings, accepting Tasker phonetically, "for coming here at all."

Tasker did not understand. But Hastings had said so many things which Tasker did not understand, that one more or less made little difference. He knew that this flippant and careless and impudent young man used him and despised him. But he knew also that he used and despised

the flippant and impudent young man. There was a little balance of hatred on Tasker's side, though he scarcely cared to show it. A man who will one day have twenty thousand a year, was not to be insulted lightly, though he had something less than nothing now. Tasker knew that the allowance of the young gentleman before him was eaten up for the next three years; but he knew also that a single quarter's income from the paternal estate was just equivalent to these responsibilities, and that Hastings senior was old and frail. It was Tasker's cue to be astonished at the fact that his client was unable to take up a bill which fell due next day. In order that his astonishment might come with natural force he took it for granted that business would go smoothly.

"If all my clients was so punctual," said Tasker, "my business relations would be quite pleasant."

"Say 'relatives,' Tasker. Your business relatives are always pleasant. Pleasantry is the badge of all your tribe."

"I forget at this moment," said Tasker, with a lifting of his arched and heavy eyebrows, "what it is that you have got to pay."

Hastings answered lazily, "I am not about to remind you too rudely of the amount, by any payment of the money."

"Goot heavens, Mr, Hastings! I hope you are not in serious earnest?"

"Set your mind at rest. I never am in serious earnest."

"I do not comprehend," said Mr. Tasker, rising. "I hope you do not mean to zay that you gannot bay me?"

"Unto that end, most valiant, am I come," Hastings answered, thrumming lightly on the table, and regarding his companion with a look of solemn gravity. "By the way," he questioned with a passing gleam of interest, "was that a quotation or an inspiration?"

"It was a bill at four months," groaned Tasker.

"He is like the dyer's hand," said the other, in abstracted soliloquy, "subdued to what he works in."

"You must not dalk in this way," exclaimed Tasker with energy. "I have debended upon you. I have engagements."

"You remind me," replied Hastings, taking out his watch, "I also have engagements. Let us get our business over. Leave your damnable faces, and begin."

"My faces is not your business," said Tasker, with well-simulated wrath. "I have had too much of this. I have ztood it too long. I will not ztand it any longer. I must be paid, Mr. Hastings —I must be paid."

"When the irresistible encounters the impregnable, what happens?" asked Hastings with an air of calm. "It is an unfortunate conjunction of

circumstances—unfortunate, but interesting—deeply interesting. Allow me to ask you to notice the situation. You must be paid. That is an absolute necessity? Very good. I cannot pay you. That is an absolute fact. Positive need on the one hand. Positive incapacity on the other."

"Do you mean to zwindle me, Mr. Hastings?" asked Tasker with an aspect of increasing anger.

"I am not accustomed to analyse my motives; but at a rough guess, I should be inclined to answer "Yes." But I am so perfectly convinced that in the end you will swindle me, that my intentions are of little moment."

It was a little curious that Tasker in simulating anger grew really angry. The gibes of his flippant client scarcely touched him, but his own presentiment of wrath awakened wrath within him. Like a good actor, he threw himself into his part with thoroughness, and became that he seemed. It took him trouble to calm himself and bring himself down to the mere acting condition again. It would have been so pleasant to rend somebody, that it was dangerous to his interests even to play at doing it in this case, lest he should yield to the temptation to do it in good earnest.

"I do not want to guarrel with you; I do not want to take exdreme measures, Mr. Hastings," Tasker resumed, having succeeded in leashing himself. "There now!" He threw himself into his chair again, and relighted his cigar. Then with

his glass in his hand, he leaned back and set his feet upon the table. "I will be galm and guiet; I will listen to reason."

"Your resolve is laudable," returned the other with the same imperturbable face and voice. "When you say that you will listen to reason, you mean that you will listen to me. I accept the implied compliment. I think I may venture to assert that I am prepared to converse with equal ease and elegance upon any topic which may be introduced."

"Aha!" laughed Tasker, the corners of his mouth a trifle tigerish—"it is all your good-humour. It is all your English fun. Now we will talk about this bill. I am tied up for money. *You* are tied up for money. Now what zhall we do?"

"Doth not Wisdom cry, and Understanding put forth her voice? Let us toss up for it."

"Dors up for what? Dors up for nothing?" asked Tasker, resolutely good-humoured. "Now, what can we do? Can you pay me in a week? In two weeks? In three weeks?"

In answer to each of these inquiries Hastings shook his head: "Renew for three months."

"Impossible!" returned Tasker, still smiling through his cloud of smoke. "I tell you I do not know where to turn. Yet I am not a poor man. I have money enough, but it is all out. And now I am galled upon to pay away money to-morrow, and I have not got it. It is all out. Gentlemen

will not pay. They all come here and zay, 'Renew,' as if I was Grœsus."

"Now listen and perpend," replied Hastings. "Three months from date I pledge you my honour either to pay or to renew again."

"I should like to keep my demper, Mr. Hastings," returned Tasker, "if you will be zo goot."

"I don't know what price you may set upon your time," the other answered, "but mine is valuable. Will you come to a conclusion?"

Tasker haggled for a while, and then came down with the proposition for which he had paved the way by all this manœuvring. "It is in your power, Mr. Hastings, to do me a vavour. It is a vavour very easy for you. A gentleman in the country, who is my very good friend, employs me to buy his bigtures. He has heard of a bigture which is to be great. He wishes to buy it. He inztructs me. But my hands are tied. I gannot disoblige my very goot friend in the country. But I gannot buy the bigture myself because the artist will not do business with me. We are not on derms with each other. Will you go and see the work, and make an offer for it? Will you zo far oblige me, my dear sir, if I renew the little bill?"

"I don't care," answered Hastings. "Who shall I say wants the picture?"

"Ah!" said Mr. Tasker, smiling once more,

"my goot friend in the country is vond of mystery. He does not wish it to be known that he is purchasing this work until it is his. Then he will zay, 'You have gome too late, you people. The work is zold. I have been before you, and the work of the year is mine for a zong.'"

"Does it occur to you, most ridiculous Tasker, that an artist might decline to sell to me for an unknown patron?"

"That is once more your fun," Tasker responded, still smiling. "You will go to your friend and zay, "You are zending this work to the Winter Exhibition? Very goot. Will you zell it for four hundred guineas? Very goot. The money will be paid one week after the bigture has been hung. Very goot again. That is all to do."

"Who is the artist?"

"The artist is Mr. Fairholt, of Montague Gardens."

"I will execute your commission, my Tasker, with joy."

"My name must not appear, you know," said Tasker, with his tigerish smile in full play. "He has guarrelled with me, and will not have anything more to do. We had a great zhindy—as you gall it—in this very room. He was angry, and we guarrelled. I must have the bigture, Mr. Hastings, for my friend in the country."

"Your friend in the country shall not be disappointed, Tasker."

Mr. Tasker, smiling, renewed the bill; and Hastings went his way to mystify Frank. The usurer, left alone once more, threw himself back into his chair; and setting his heels upon the table, held inward communion. Mr. Tasker thought in German, but his thoughts translated ran thus: "Mr. Benjamin Hartley entrusts me with this commission. I accept it, as in duty bound; and I accept it gladly, because it opens up a way to a sly and mean vengeance after my own heart. I will plague this impertinent artist by this means. I know how he was able to pay me last time; and I think he has pumped that well dry for a little while. If I could only get him into my hands again! If I could get him for a bill he could not meet, and could hold back the price of the picture, and plague his proud heart for a week or two. If I could have him here begging for time, and knowing all the while that he was independent of me if he only knew it, and knowing that he did not know it. I could keep Hastings from speaking. I could have out half-a-dozen writs against him, and send him over to Boulogne for quiet. Fairholt should not guess where he had got to. He should not know the purchaser of his picture. He should be waiting for money, and hoping for it every day; and he should tremble under my hand. He should beg my pardon. He should pay me such

interest as was never paid before. He should cringe and sue to me; and then I would apply to his father for payment, and then I would send him Mr. Benjamin Hartley's cheque. He should be humiliated, and exposed, and tortured with hope, and his hope should drop into his hands an hour too late." Thus thought Tasker, until his own pleasant imaginings became too tantalising for him. "Himmel!" said Tasker with a sigh, "it is too goot to be drue." He rose and paced up and down the room. "But it zhall not vail because I do not try it. I zhould like to ruin him, to break him down and bring him into beggary. 'My pound of vlesh.' I can try for it at least."

Dr. Johnson liked a good hater, but I do not think he would have been enamoured of Mr. Tasker, who was a decent hater as times go.

Hastings pursued his leisurely way to Montague Gardens, untroubled and light of heart. He beguiled the way by self-satisfied reflection. Yet he was in his way a philosopher, and valued himself pretty accurately at times. "There is a little demon inside you, my friend," he told himself, "who overmasters you upon occasion, and clouds your finer faculties." Having nobody else to chaff at this juncture, he chaffed himself, laughing at his own incongruities of character and of speech, and looking on at himself like a quite disinterested spectator, and enjoying the spectacle. Life had

been so far an uninterrupted series of passages of light comedy. He was leading comedian and audience in one. He looked on at himself, admiring his own *sang-froid* and impudence and jollity. He talked as much to himself as to others, and in the same strain. He was sufficient audience to himself, and perpetually aired himself behind the comedy footlights for his own delectation. He admired himself beyond measure, and thought himself at bottom one of the humblest men in the world.

Arriving at Frank's rooms, he found the artist hard at work, and jovial. At the sight of the picture, now nearly completed, Hastings stood still in genuine admiration. The artist had struggled after a very difficult and subtle effect, and had all but perfectly succeeded in catching it. An autumn corn-field, with shocks of corn here and there. A level country melts gradually into the distance. The late sunlight is so faint and dim that only the faintest shadows lie upon the ground. They are made the fainter by a pallid gleam of moonlight, which struggles for supremacy with the light of the fading sun, and will gain it before long. It is this delicate blending of light which makes the beauty of the picture. Perhaps the *technique* of the work is not altogether perfect. Over that let the critics quarrel if they will; but the poetry of the work is pure and strong. Its grouping is beyond all cavil. The ideal at which it aims is

high, and only missed by the merest trifle. Only missed by that mere trifle, because the painter has not yet arrived at the complete artistic mastery of himself. You feel somehow a suspicion of juvenility in the worker. You may see the picture now if you choose—at any time when the family is in town or abroad—by a journey to Hartley Hall. It is one of the gems of the great millionaire's almost unrivalled collection. It has taken its place and is pointed out now as the work of the most promising artist of his time. The housekeeper will make a vague shot or two at the mystery which this story for the first time clears. She will tell you, if you care to listen, that she knew the young gentleman who painted it, and will describe him to you, and will relate further that a niece of hers was upper housemaid in the household of the artist's father. She will dwell on the respectability of that old county family, and on the melancholy enigma of the handsome and gifted young artist's fate.

"Fairholt," said Hastings, laying a hand upon his friend's shoulder, "this is noble; this is great; this is worthy of you."

"It will sell, anyhow," returned Frank, taking his friend's enthusiasm for chaff.

"My dear Fairholt," said Hastings, "I mean it, every word. It is my fate to be believed when I desire to be discredited, and doubted when I would be believed. This is a great work, Fairholt."

"Be serious for once, and tell me what you really think of it."

"I am about to give you practical proof of what I think of it. I am here on business. Wait until I have finished and then tell me I am incredible. I am commissioned to buy this work; I am commissioned to offer you four hundred guineas for it. Now, I advise you—put another hundred on it. I advise you as a friend. Put another hundred on it. Do now—to oblige me."

"You look serious," said Frank, standing before him, pipe in mouth.

"The Rhadamanthine gloom which veils my brow," returned Hastings, with an airy cheerfulness of explanation, "is but an earnest of the soul within."

"Do you really mean that you have a commission to buy this picture?" Frank asked, pointing at it with his maul-stick.

"I am painfully reminded of the statement of Dr. Watts, where, with a profound philosophy which was a real credit to him, he remarks 'A liar we can never trust, though he should speak the think that's true.'"

"I don't thing you would have the execrable taste to do this in jest."

"You do me honour," replied Hastings.

"'Doubt that the stars are fire;
Doubt that the earth doth move;
Doubt truth to be a liar,
But never doubt"

that I have a commission to purchase this work of art for the sum of four hundred guineas."

"Then I have done work for the day. Come out, Hastings, and dine somewhere. Who's the purchaser?"

"There, I regret to say, I am forbidden to speak. The purchaser folds himself in mystery."

"This is too absurd," said Frank, a little angrily.

"My dear boy," answered Hastings, "but that I am forbid to tell the secrets of my prisonhouse, I would a tale unfold. Don't get angry, Fairholt. Now, am I serious? The fact of the case is this, I am deputed by a gentleman who does not wish his name to appear, to offer you four hundred guineas for this picture. If you accept, the money will be paid within one week of the opening of the Winter Exhibition. If you refuse, the envoy retires discomfited."

"Refuse! I have no intention that way, I assure you. Come. Is it your father, Hastings?"

"It is not my father, nor any relative of mine, or friend of mine. I am simply the agent. Am I to say you accept?"

"Yes. By Jove, sir, this is a fortunate hit!" Frank, in extravagant glee, posed with pipe and

maul-stick. "Do you know, Hastings," he went on, recovering himself, "that I sold the daub at the Academy last week? Got two hundred for un. I am like that thundering blacksmith, and can look the whole world in the face, for I owe not any man. Paid all my debts. Deposited coin to meet the bill which dear old Will backed for me only a week or two ago. Free of all responsibilities. Five-and-forty quid to the good. Four hundred in prospective, and a quarterly allowance due in a fortnight."

"I believe you dropped a hint just now about dining somewhere?"

"Which I did," responded Frank. "Which I will demean myself by standing treat to the commercial party wot negotiates."

With a laugh, Frank flung himself out of the studio, and in a few minutes returned radiant in his costume. He was booted and gloved as delicately as a lady. His air was elate and sprightly. The well-browned meerschaum—Bohemian emblem—sent forth clouds. Removing the pipe from his lips, he roared forth scraps of the *Marseillaise*, and made tragic passes at Hastings with his walking-cane. Next seizing that impassive young gentleman by the arm, he sallied forth into the street with such a beaming pleasure in his handsome face, that people positively turned to look after him. His spirits were at fever-heat, and he chattered incessantly. The streets were growing

cool after the heat of the day; and when a man is happy, even the streets of London may be pleasant to him. The shadows were growing longer; there was a soft, hazy languor in the air. In these prosperous quarters, the window-gardens looked charming. The variegated blinds did something towards destroying the monotony of the streets. The very "cooee" of the milkman was pleasant. Who cannot remember such times? I remember that London has seemed beautiful. But it was years ago.

If you are travelling from Montague Gardens to Pall-Mall, your pleasantest way is through St. James's Park, though when hurried you may find a shorter route. Frank and Hastings were not hurried, but the contrary. Is there any beauty in a manly face like that given by unaffected gaiety? I think not. The young artist looked like an incarnate sunbeam—so bright, so jovial. Nursemaids turned round and looked upon him with undisguised admiration, and their charges brightened at his merry, noisy laughter. Youth and high spirits sparkled in him like champagne, and flushed his face, and gave light to his eyes. His laugh rose like a bubbling fountain of wine. He and Hastings strolled through the park, and out of its sunlight and freshness into the shadows of Pall-Mall; dusty despite the one ribbon-like streak of moisture which the recent watering-cart had left behind.

Entering Pall-Mall, and taking the first turn

to the left, you may find the site of the club at which these two dined that day. The club has vanished. Its members are distributed through the four quarters of the globe. Some are dead and buried long ago. They were all young fellows then—mostly followers of the arts. Very gay, very noisy, very untrammelled, very happy they were. The club system was a younger and a fresher thing then than now, and all the more enjoyment was therefore to be extracted from it. There are no clubs like it nowadays. The piano in the smoke-room—the nightly songs and speeches and discussions—the select section, a club within a club, which called itself the Claret Conclave, and whose members drank that wine alone within the club confines—the chorus wherein all men then present nightly joined—the moustached and olive-complexioned gentlemen of the Royal Opera, who came down late at night and sometimes stayed until early in the morning, making the walls sweetly vocal—the eminent old tragedian who spouted there, "mouthing his hollow *oe*'s and *ae*'s" in sonorous dissertations upon *Hamlet*—the eminent old comedian who told his droll storis with so droll an air—where be all these things and people now? They are dead and gone, lady—they are dead and gone. Let the turf be green and light above them, and the stone of remembrance not unkindly graven.

The culinary resources of this establishment, though not at that pitch of perfection which satisfies

Young England now, were not to be despised. Over the mysteries of the *cuisine* no Parisian *maître d'hôtel* presided; but was not old Nicholas trained in the very citadel of cookery, and was there his equal in any of the statelier clubs hard by? The club bragged of Nicholas, not without justification. At Frank's special command, Nicholas went beyond himself. It was another charm of this old club, that when you went to dine there, you held a special consultation with the cook, and arranged your dinner with as much deliberation and care and forethought as you chose to exercise. Nicholas took his clients—let me call them by no meaner name for his sake—into his confidence. Sure of his resources, and eager and proud to please, he yet advised and persuaded, offering with a humility the more charming for the greatness of him who displayed it, gentle, and sausive counsel, not often rejected. Would they give Nicholas but half-an-hour? Would they not? And at the end of it came such an atonement for delay as few men find in this unsatisfactory world.

All enjoyments come to an end. Even five-and-twenty cannot dine for ever. It is to be regretted perhaps that the capacity of five-and-twenty for drinking is less limited when it gives its mind that way. "Ethereal, flushed," these young gentlemen left the table and adjourned to the smoking-room. They were hailed boisterously. It was Music-night, and every man who entered

these precincts must sing if the assembled members willed that he should sing. No plea of inability to sing—no excuse of hoarseness would avail. So long as the Gigantic Native sat at the piano, no lapsus of memory could serve as a loop-hole for escape. For the Gigantic Native knew by heart every song of Europe, or thereabouts, and would roar you the words, line by line, whilst those enormous but facile hands of his went flying over the keys. Now Frank was the swell vocalist of the club, and Hastings was its special singer of comic songs. With what a tragic fury the latter warbled the many-tuned ditties of Sam Cowell. In what a tremendous bass he declaimed "Behold me! You told me," and the rest of it. In what *debonair* fashion he related that Alonzo he was handsome, and Alonzo he was young. How exquisitely and in what a soft and tender falsetto he trilled forth the protestations of the young lady. And could the Great Sam himself approach him in that exquisite fidelity to the Cockney style and accent which was one of the special features of his presentiment of the story of Young Susan and the Ship's Carpenteer? The varying emphasis of that charming chorus:

"Singin' doddle, doddle, doddle, chip, chum, chow,
choora, li, la,"

now given with martial fire, and now with melting feeling, and now with scathing sarcasm, who—if

not the Great Sam himself—should presume to strive to equal?

And was not Frank poet as well as singer—and had not Herr Broekenyack set his last to music, and was not the fame thereof bruited abroad? Herr Professor was absent; but the Gigantic Native was there with a blotted manuscript, undecipherable by any man save himself at the piano; and after preliminary settlings of his coat and arrangings of his wristsbands, as though preparing to tear the instrument in sunder, instead thereof, kissed its keys most delicately with his finger tips, and tripped through the dainty prelude. Frank stood at the piano, flushed, confident, handsome—a tender sentiment in his heart; for the words were of Maud, and reminded him of her. He closed his eyes for a second, and was back at the gate in the gardens again, and the evening sunlight was tranquil on the tranquil fields. But the note of preparation sounded, and he sang this song:—

"Her spirit dwells about me like a thought;
I know her far, yet feel her near the while;
For me all rapture of delight is caught
In her remembered smile.
And London's wintry evening, mirk and grey,
Is fair as summer's fairest, when the skies
Fade into one pure azure, and the day,
Worn out with pleasure, dies!"

Great applause followed; for they were generous and genial young people all, and proud of

their comrades and of their achievements, and they had a sublime belief in each other, and were bound in the bonds of an enduring brotherhood. So, with rattling of glasses, and rapping of tables, and hearty *bravos* and *vivas* in his ears, Frank resumed his seat. We affected whishy-punch here, observe you, we who were not of that old Claret Conclave. "Whisky-punch, sir? Yessir." The very waiter was proud to wait on Frank. Hastings had disseminated the story of the sold pictures. The Academy success of the year was already assured. Frank was the hero of the place and the hour. Hastings had of course told each man privately, and in confidence; and by the time each man felt disposed to impart the confidence to some one else, almost everybody knew. But they all came —to the number of five-and-twenty perhaps—and congratulated Frank in private, and shook hands with him gladly, and told him how pleased they were at his successes.

"Fairholt," said Hastings, "this is growing dull and noisy. Dulness is unpleasant, and noise is unpleasant. Combined they are unbearable. Come away."

"I'll tell you what I'll do," said Frank gaily. "I'll give you your revenge. On one condition—that you never ask me to touch a card again. But I won heavily from you last time, old fellow, and I can afford to play to-night, eh?"

"Your star is in the ascendant to-night,"

Hastings answered. "But I like to go where the fight is hottest. Come along. Not here. Let us get away where we can be quiet."

The time is an hour after midnight, the place the card-room of the club in which you first met Hastings. There are four men playing at *vingt-et-un*. Two of them we know; the other two you would probably not care to care to know.

"Cleaned out?" says Hastings, looking up at Frank.

"Cleaned out," responds Frank, with an idiotic laugh, and a lurch forward at a tumbler.

"Wait here a moment," Hastings answers, and rising somewhat unsteadily, leaves the room.

There is an exultant light in Mr. Tasker's eyes as he enters a minute or two afterwards. A smile flickers at the corners of his mouth.

Frank comes to meet him.

"No, Hastings," he says, with an air of stern determination, "I have no more to do with this fellow."

"Why, Mr. Vairhold," says Mr. Tasker cheerfully, "you gannot zurely bear malice for a hasty wort. I am very sorry. I apologise with all my heart."

Frank looks upon him for a moment, and relaxes. "You're a good fellow, Tasker. I'm afraid I have been very unpolite. Excuse me."

They shake hands, and the foolish young

fellow laughs again. They retire to a table at the far end of the room.

"In your name, Mr. Vairhold?" asks Tasker, sitting there with a pen in his hand.

"Of course," Frank answers. "Be quiet, Hastings.—Hastings is hard up, you know," he tells Tasker, with another idiotic laugh.

"It is lucky," says Tasker in a low voice, "that I have gash about me. It is all a jance. I have seventy-five. Will that do?"

"That's enough," says Frank, lurching at the notes.

"Zhall I zay at three months?" asked Mr. Tasker. "I will not zay a hundred. I do not like level figures. Ninety-eight pounds ten; for value received. Thank you." Mr. Tasker puts the promissory-note into his pocket-book, shakes hands and goes. Frank calls him back.

"You'll forget all about that, you know, old fellow. You're a good fellow."

"Oh yes!" says Tasker, with genial good-humour. "I am a good vellow. We are all good vellows." As he goes down-stairs he rubs his hands gleefully. "What a sdroke of luck!" He pauses beneath the lamplight at the foot of the stairs, and looks at the note again. "At three months—Ninety-eight pounds ten."

CHAPTER XII.

HISTORY.

The broken windows winked and leered with patches.

DR. BRAND sat in an easy-chair and smoked a quiet cigar after the fatigues of the day. You may recognise him, though you have spent so small a time in his society. Dr. Brand was not a man to be easily forgotten, having been once encountered. In the first place, he had the advantage of physical size wherewith to impress you. In the second place, his eagle beak and his square jaw, his keen and somewhat too imperious eyes, his big broad head, and his wavy mass of grizzled hair, were each memorable. A great loose-limbed, masterful-looking man, with kindnesses in him and coarsenesses. A man who was alive to the very ends of his hair, and who rejoiced in life. An old Viking sort of man, who ate and drank hugely, worked inordinately, laughed out of all form and fashion, had gigantic rages, and strange fits of tenderness—altogether, a remarkable man.

Seated opposite was the doctor's wife, who was just such a contrast to him as such a man might delight in—a pretty little creature who, though thirty, looked no more than twenty. The kind of woman who seems to be made for the

express purpose of idolising the Dr. Brand kind of man. You might almost guess how much she idolised him, by the satisfied expression of her eyes as they rested upon him in placid watchfulness of all his loose and careless movements.

"*Ma mie,*" said the doctor, "my practice increases enormously."

"Indeed, James?"

"I shall shortly have to retire in self-defence. I have a whole mob of people who are trying to absorb my time. They live in a court off Oxford Street, and are not worth one penny per annum."

"I suppose not."

"I might," said the doctor, rolling himself round in his chair to look at her—"I might say, 'Let the parish doctor see to 'em.' But he can't see to 'em. I don't know him; but if that man does his duty, he will work himself to death. Six of him would be worked to death."

"Is there so much sickness?"

"The wonder isn't that there's so much sickness as that there is so little. You'd say so if you saw the hole they live in. I thought I knew the slums, but God bless my soul!" said the doctor, rolling round again, "I couldn't have believed it."

"What made you go there?" asked his wife.

"Do you remember Penkridge?" asked the doctor, in return.

"Penkridge? Do you mean the odd little man

who kept the stationer's shop in Camberwell? Oh, yes; I remember how I used to laugh at him, he was so comically civil."

The doctor set his feet upon a chair before him and lolled there broadcast. He smoked for a while and answered:—"You wouldn't laugh at him now, *ma mie*. Such a ragged, drunken, helpless, hopeless scoundrel — such a lost, tearful, lachrymose, whining villain. A dog of such ill odour, spiritually and physically."

"I think I remember to have heard," said Mrs. Brand, "that he got into the hands of some dreadful person, who ruined him."

"Bah!" roared the doctor with sudden energy. "That kind of man always gets into the hands of people who ruin him. The miserable fool of a fly invites the spider to live in his neighbourhood; he makes a chum of him, and helps him to spin his web. I do protest," said the doctor, struggling up to say it, and sitting with a hand upon each elbow of his chair—"I do protest that I have no atom of sympathy with that sort of creature. I can get up no pity for him."

"Now, I am sure, James," said the doctor's wife, "that you have been helping him."

"Helping him!" the doctor growled behind his cigar like an angry bassoon. "I know I've been helping him. But I have the grace to be ashamed of myself. What is that favourite of yours says—the she-poet—Whatshername? 'I feel as if

I nad a man in me despising such a woman.' To help a man of that sort is a waste of good material. There is only so much medical talent in the world. Not half enough to supply the world's wants—not half enough, I mean, to supply that part of the world which deserves to have its wants supplied. Nine-tenths of the ridiculous world we live in is so hopelessly rotten, that a man tinkers at it to no purpose. It can't be mended—it can't be restored. The wisest and kindliest thing to do would be to poison ninety per cent. of the people of this planet, and start afresh with the healthy remainder."

"I have heard that dreadful theory before," said the doctor's wife. "But how are you going to decide who is to live? Suppose some dreadful person wished to poison me?"

"I'd knock his head off," said the doctor promptly. "Let me demonstrate your right to exist. I am a man of unusual abilities; I am profoundly versed in the noblest of all human arts; I have energies which are absolutely unwearable, and I get through the work of ten ordinary men daily."

"I have heard all this before," responded Mrs. Brand, laughing; "and used to believe it until I got married and disillusionised. But we are not concerned with you at present. What is my right to exist?"

"What a lovely sex it is!" said the doctor;

"always waits to hear an argument out before it dreams of speaking. Your right to exist, my dear, is that I desire you to exist. If I am useful for ten, I may claim life for two."

"Suppose your desire should cease, you mountain of egotism?"

"Your right would vanish, you atom of charms!"

"James—you're a monster."

"Jennie—you're an angel!"

"A highly satisfactory termination," said the doctor's wife, "to a most unsatisfactory debate."

At this the doctor rose, picked up his wife's chair with his wife in it, kissed the little lady, set her down again, burst into a great roar of laughter, and dropped back into his armchair. Mrs. Brand accepted this as though she were quite used to it, and regarded the laughing giant with the same look of calm and watchful affection as before. "What were you saying about Penkridge, James?" she asked after a little pause.

"It was his wife I was thinking of. She died last night."

"What did she die of?"

"She died chiefly of Penkridge, I should say. But the shameless waste and sinful luxury of this big London helped her. In plain English, she died of hunger."

"James!" said the doctor's wife; "you don't mean that?"

"Yes; I mean that. She did of actual hunger,

Jennie; and that tearful villain her husband was half-drunk. Think what that means."

"How dreadful!"

"Do you see?" said the doctor, sitting up again. "He had money enough to drink with somehow. She died of starvation."

"Perhaps some one gave him drink who would not give him money."

"I hope so." The doctor subsided again. "Jennie," he went on, "these things hurt me. If a man could do anything in such a case—If I could have dropped Penkridge, for instance, from the garret window. That man's squalor and degradation," said the doctor keenly, "are not a misery to him. He finds a compensation in idleness and an occasional burst of drinking, and more than all, in his wailings about his having been ruined, and so forth. There are some men to whom it's a positive comfort to have an injury done to them; they find a luxurious joy in the ability to complain that they have been damaged."

"Do you know, James," said the doctor's wife, coming nearer, and sitting on an ottoman beside him, with a hand upon his arm— "do you know that I feel myself very idle and very useless? I daresay it's very foolish in me, but I feel almost sorrier for people who won't help themselves than I do for those who can't. I mean that when people won't help themselves, and don't even want to try, it seems to imply such a dreadful *inward*

want somewhere. You know what I mean, don't you?"

"Perfectly," said the doctor.

"James, I have been thinking seriously, and this talk reminds me again. I must do something; I must justify my claim to exist, dear."

"*Ma mie*," said the doctor, throwing away his cigar, and taking one of her hands in both his, "your clear mission is to give heart and hope to me. If it weren't for you, my energies would be wasted. I should have turned myself into a hermit, and have gone to live in the cave of speculative science, long ago, if I hadn't had you beside me."

Mrs. Brand looked at him smilingly, and shook her head. "I must do something," she reiterated. "Now, shall I tell you what I have been thinking?"

"Wait a moment. Let me compose myself to listen. Give me a glass of claret, whilst I light a cigar.—Thank you. I am ready now." He set his slippered feet upon the chair before him, and composed his huge figure comfortably. His eyes had lost that too imperious glance. He stroked the little hand that rested upon the elbow of his chair.

"I have been thinking, James," said Mrs. Brand seriously, "that I can see a clear way of doing good, and I want to ask your advice about it. It seems to me that a great many benevolent enterprises fail, dear, because the people who start them are anxious to do too much, and to do it

in an unnatural way. Lady-visitors, for instance." —The doctor nodded, to signify attention.—"Now a lady goes into one of the places you were speaking of just now, and says a few kind words, and does a few kind things to a great many people. I hope it does good. I don't think it can fail to do some good. But wouldn't it be better, dear, to single out some one hopeful case, and confine one's self to that case, not carrying it away, but leaving it as a sort of wholesome centre, out of which something might possibly grow? I want to try some such experiment, James; and I want to get one or two other people to do the same. It seems to me that one clean room and one tidy figure in such a place as Bolter's Rents must be, might be of great service. And one clean heart and well-ordered mind might do incalculable good."

"Have you thought at all of the counteracting influences?" asked the doctor.

"Yes. I am really not too sanguine. I am only thinking of what might happen. But isn't there likelihood enough to make it worth while to try?"

"Put yourself for a moment," said the doctor, "in the place of your imaginary girl. You have, of course, a surety against her gross temptations, which she couldn't have. Think how anybody not so vile as themselves would grow to loathe the people who live there. The place is a moral nightmare. You would grow sick at physical and

spiritual filth, and would do one of three things: sink down to it—go mad over it—or run away from it."

"You forget," said Mrs. Brand, arguing her case more warmly. "I am squeamish by training, as no girl brought up as any girl would have to be in such a case could possibly be. I don't want to make a lady. I want to help to rear a decent Christian woman, who shall be clean and neat and sober, and know the ways of the people, and be able to do more for them than anybody from the outside. And I think that's possible."

"Did you ever see Bolter's Rents?" asked the doctor grimly.

"No," answered the doctor's wife.

"Come and see it now," said the doctor rising. "Ah! I was afraid you would not be particularly eager."

"I am quite ready to go, James."

"Put on your plainest bonnet and your quietest shawl," the doctor answered. "It's a fine moonlight night, and Bolter's Rents is not far from Wimpole Street."

Mrs. Brand left the room. If the truth must be told, her spirits faltered somewhat at the thought of a visit by night to such a place, and her enthusiasm cooled a little, but remembering her husband's familiarity with the place and people, and recalling her confidence in him, she attired herself as plainly as she could, and rejoined the doctor,

who was already drawing on his gloves in the hall. They went out together arm-in-arm, through quiet ways, until they emerged on the long-drawn glare and bustle of Oxford Street.

"Have you your vinegarette?" asked the doctor.

"No, dear," responded Mrs. Brand.

Dr. Brand turned into a chemist's shop and bought a bottle of smelling salts. "Put that in your pocket," he said; adding, with an almost tragic solemnity, "you may possibly want it. The scents are infernal."

Walking on the right-hand side of the street, and facing towards Holborn, they turned abruptly into a narrow and low-browed passage, which yawned like a black mouth on brilliant Oxford Street. The passage was too confined to allow of their walking abreast; and with a brief injunction to follow, and a reassuring tap upon his wife's shoulder, the doctor led the way. Looking past his ponderous figure, Mrs. Brand saw before her a long dim vista of murky building, with one solitary light gleaming at the far end of it. The way underneath her feet grew moist and spongy; a faint and sickly odour greeted her nostrils. She laid her hand upon the bottle of smelling-salts, but resisted the inclination, determining to show no sign of annoyance so soon. Entering on the court which lay beyond the passage, the two went side by side once more. One or two women, unutter-

ably coarse and frowsy, stood in a little patch of moonlight with their hands under their aprons, and their hair in wild disorder. They lolled against the wall, or stood uprightly vacant, or shambled, loosely from side to side, but said nothing, and were without occupation. There were one or two hulking lads engaged in noisy horse-play under the shadow of the houses on the other side of the court, and cursing like inmates of the pit. The broken windows winked and leered with patches. If by chance a whole window was anywhere left, it stared out on the moonlight, vacant, blank, and blind. A house is always more or less human. The houses in Bolter's Rents were like humanity in vile decay. A door hanging stiffly from one useless hinge suggested lockjaw. This wall which bowed inward until it seemed a wonder that it stood, had in it a reminder of the looks and bearing of a broken-down old debauchée. There was a mere hole where the garret window should have been, which looked in its blank darkness like the black patch over an eye. A great beam of timber which propped up the building looked like the stick upon which that bankrupt old blackguard leaned. Rusty bars of iron passed from this ruin to the buildings on either side of it, as though the hoary rascal were chained to the companions whom he had by bad example led hither. They leaned upon him from either side, stupid and hopeless, and rapidly coming to his own sad case. Every-

where an air of shameful ruin, and an air of shame, as though the very walls and windows were conscious of their wretched plight, and had hidden away here from the gay and brilliant street outside. The end of the court was deserted, and the solitary lamp showed nothing but an open doorway gaping darkly underneath it. Mrs. Brand felt an almost unconquerable inclination to seize her husband's arm and beg him to come away. Nothing but a feeling of shame restrained her.

The doctor paused there, and said, "This is the house I visited last night. You are not afraid to go in?"

"No," answered his wife, belying her own quaking heart.

"You are quite safe with me, dear," said the doctor, taking her hand in his, and speaking in a cheerful tone. "The steps of this establishment are eccentric. Step carefully after me, and let me keep your hand."

They went up in the darkness until they came to the top of the third flight of steps, where the doctor tapped at a door.

"You're moighty poloite, whoever y' are," said a voice inside with a tone of sarcasm. "But we're not that private here that ye mayn't walk in."

Dr. Brand pushed open the door and entered, relinquishing his companion's hand.

"Is is you, docthor?" said the owner of the voice—an Irish woman, not uncomely in aspect,

nor yet dreadfully unclean.—"But who's that with ye?" she asked sharply and suspiciously.—"Oh, a lady.—I beg your pardon, ma'am.—But they're afther Mike, sor, I'm afraid, an' it makes me that nervous. Will ye look at the choild?"

Mrs. Brand looked round the room, and saw the old tea-chests, the larger chest which did duty as a table, the bed of sacking, the tattered hanging which parted off one corner of the chamber. Nothing else.

"The little gyurl's upstairs with the choild," said Mrs. Closky; adding with a face and voice so significant that it struck the attention of Mrs. Brand at once: "She's watchin'." With that she left the room; and Mrs. Brand turned to her husband.

He read her glance and answered, "The body of that poor woman lies above. The rats here are as hungry as she was before she died."

"James, James!" cried Mrs. Brand, clinging to him. "Oh, why did I dare to come into this dreadful place!"

"Hush!" said the doctor, almost sternly. "Let me think better of you than this, Jennie. —Come, come," he added in a softer tone; "take courage. This is but a little part of that human hell in which you fancy you could minister. There is nothing here but misery. This house is the most orderly and decent in the court." He ceased there; but turning round to the window, cried inwardly, in a silent rage of pity and emotion, "My

God! would it be a crime to give a sleeping-draught to every soul within it, and burn this hideous rookery down?"

He turned and took his wife's hand again, and found her trembling. He put his arm about her, and drew her to his breast. Thought is swift; and as he held her there for a moment, he thought of all the placid quiet of her lot, the purity of her gentle life, the comfort and security which reigned about her. He thought too of his own chances in life, so favourably ordered, so smoothly progressive from good to better. He thanked God for these things; but a moment after, half-recalled the thanksgiving; for it seemed to him almost blasphemous in its selfishness that he should be thankful for that which gained a poignant bliss from such an awful contrast.

His wife withdrew herself from his embrace. "I am stronger, now, James," she said, speaking with a self-possession which astonished herself. "I think I am the more resolved for coming; indeed I am. I had read of things like this," she continued, her eyes greatening as she spoke; "but I never realised them before."

"What you have seen and heard so far, *ma mie*, is nothing," the doctor answered. "This squalor"—pointing round the room—"is nothing. The ugly fear upstairs is common to places such as this. Vice is the seed from which the real horror of these places springs. Of that you have

seen nothing—shall see nothing, if I can advise you."

His wife returned no answer; and in another moment they heard a footstep and a weakly wailing voice upon the stairs; and Mrs. Closky entered with the child. By the doctor's orders, she took off such miserable clothing as it wore, and was about to lay it on the larger chest with a shawl underneath it, when Mrs. Brand whipped off her own shawl, and deftly folding it, laid it on the chest beneath the other, to make the temporary couch a little softer. Mrs. Closky looked at her and at the rich dress which now stood revealed, but said nothing.

The doctor stopped to examine the child. "Has the parish doctor been here, Mrs. Closky?" he asked.

"Yes, sor. He kem an' lift the death-paper, sor, an' looked at the choild. An' he says her inwards isn't damaged, but her back's twisted for loife; an' he lift a linimint."

"Let me see it," said the doctor, still bending over the child. "Is this it? H'm. No harm—and no good." Then after a pause, "I am afraid he is right about the child. Yes; he is right."

Mrs. Brand bent above the child also. Its feeble wail troubled her, as it might trouble any woman. "Can I send it anything from the house, James?" she asked her husband.

He waved his hand in answer, as if asking

for silence, and turned to Mrs. Closky. "Can you bring the child to my house to-night?"

"Oh yes, sor," answered Mrs. Closky readily.

"Then do so—in an hour.—Now, *ma mie*, let us go."

Mrs. Closky lifted up the baby and the shawl. Mrs. Brand looked at her own shawl lying on the chest, and then at the woman's bare shoulders; for Mrs. Blosky was of what I believe the women call "a body," and had bestowed upon the baby the only covering her shoulders had. The doctor saw the glance and read its meaning, but settled matters by taking up the shawl and wrapping Mrs. Brand carefully up in it. They went carefully down the dark and creaking steps, and emerged from the court; and in another minute were back in Oxford Street, with its brilliant gas-lights and its hurrying crowds.

"I might have left it with her, James," said the doctor's wife, after a pause during which they had reached one of the quieter streets.

"It would have been pawned in the morning," the doctor answered. "Give the woman something cheap, unpawnable, and fragmentary, and you do her a charity. Give her anything pawnable, and her husband, on returning home, will knock her down to rob her of it, and get drunk on the proceeds."

Mrs. Brand made no reply, but mused on these things sorrowfully, hoping within herself that

the evil was not quite so evil as her husband painted it. As they walked quietly along together and came near to the end of the street, a man suddenly darted round the corner, planted himself with his back against the wall, and stood there in shadow. The doctor directed a glance at him in passing, and recognised Michael Closky. Knowing what he knew, it was not unnatural that the doctor should suspect mischief of some sort. It was not his business to help the police, if Michael had upset one of the force, or in a playful ebullition of feeling had taken a cast in pewter from the face of a pot-boy, but he felt a momentary curiosity. Turning into the street from which Closky had so suddenly emerged he found it quiet and deserted. There was no sign of pursuit. There was not a human being, on the causeway. Half-way up the street there was an open door, at which two men stood smoking. As the doctor and his wife went by, these two bade each other a friendly good night, and one, closing the door, remained inside, whilst the other, gaily swinging his cane, tripped down the steps, humming a muffled fragment of an air behind his cigar. Dr. Brand recognised in him a German Jew who once upon a time was a patient of his. This German Jew was something in the City, the doctor remembered in an absent sort of way— an agent or something of that kind, whose name was Tasker. He gave no second thought to the gay foreigner,

but passed on. And Tasker, uuwitting of the darker shadow which nestled in the shadows round the corner, went merrily towards it, humming a muffled fragment of an air behind his cigar.

CHAPTER XIII.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY.

"Jack," said Polly, suddenly breaking into sobs, "don't be an angel."

I REMEMBER how the darkness swallowed up those two flying figures, and I recall the blank of waiting terror which ensued. I remember the hurry and bustle in the house, the lanterns flitting to and fro in the fields, the faint cries of the distant searchers as they hallooed to each other. The lights flickered here and there, and the voices called, until the trees about the lawn grew black with the darkness of the night. Then the search was given up, and Cousin Will came back to the house with the serving-men behind him. Gascoigne had slipped out, and I was left alone. The terror I was in was mingled with the keenest watchfulness, and I could swear now, after all this lapse of time, to the merest incident or sound of that dreadful hour. The little room grew darker and more terrible, but I could not have moved from it to save my life. There seemed a heavy horror in

the air, which compassed me round about and weighed me down like the fear in a dream; and when at last Aunt Bertha entered with a lamp, the rush with which this horror deserted me was too great a thing for a child's nerves to bear. The soul is able to carry such and such a burden, and no more. If Nature or Circumstance lay another feather's weight upon it, the soul evades the burden and slips into oblivion, as mine did then.

I suppose that the seeds of fever must have been within me when this shock came, and that with or without it I should certainly have had to face an illness sooner or later. But with the shock they sprang to life at once, and for many and many a day the outer world was dark to me. I know now that my delirium lasted six weeks; but in fever, the time which sane mortals count by goes for nothing. I lay in pitch-black darkness for whole eternities, and the solar system has no space for the vast distances which separated me from the only thing which had survived me with the wreck and ruin of the universe. That other survival was an unimaginable fear, which through eternities of space and time grew nearer, with such a horrid, unrelenting, purposed slowness as no sane words or thoughts have power to picture. There I lay and waited, whilst from uncounted æons of space beyond the extinguished sun this hideous terror crept and crept, nearer, and nearer, and

nearer. And I never knew at any second throughout these lingering ages, but that the hoarded and eternal hate it held might not flame out against this black delay of dread, and be at once upon me. And I knew then as well as I know now, that the terror was nothing more or less than the stranger's face.

At the end of all this, I remember falling, very slowly indeed, into some great gulf of night, which hid me from that overmastering awe, and closed softly over me with such a benediction of rest and sleep as only a return from madness ever knew. And into this blessed gulf of forgetfulness I sank so far, that when I woke again the very shadow of my fear was gone. I heard the gurgle of water, and lay with closed eyes and listened. There was the rustle of leaves somewhere near, and the whispering sound of a woman's dress, and the quiet step of a woman's feet were close to me. Something cool and soft touched my forehead—a woman's hand. A cool drink was put to my lips, and I do not believe that ever an Arab pilgrim found a draught more sweet at the desert well. It is worth while to have been ill to experience the first delights of getting well again. I did not open my eyes to see who administered the draught; I was too utterly weak to be curious. When, after another blessed, restful sleep, my eyes opened of themselves, I saw that I was in my own bedroom, with its sloping roof, and the

honeysuckle was murmuring and bowing at the window. My nurse, whoever she might be, sat at the window looking out upon those wide-spread fields which I could see in languid fancy as I lay. What made the languid fancy clearer was that I could hear the village lads at cricket. I knew the crack with which bat and ball came together, though it was faint with distance; and the murmurous voices of the players floated in at the open casement as though they were part of the perfume of the fields.

My attendant moved noiselessly in her chair, and drawing a letter from her pocket read it through. I meantime perused her face, and read no line of anything but good there. It was a face of singular beauty, or seemed so to me, and its characteristic was a sort of ineffable, gentle softness. It was a face in which the weakest and poorest thing that breathes, the most timid and most helpless, might have had instant faith and trust. It was so gentle and tender in its look, so harmless and so sad, that it filled me, though I lay there as a sick child, and nigh death's door, with a sense of pity and affection, and a vague feeling of desire to protect and defend. We grow backward in wisdom as we leave childhood behind us, because we leave intuition and trust to observation. And most of all we lose, in losing that wisdom of affection which makes the child so far better a creature than the accomplished man or

woman. I knew already the look of patient sorrow in the eyes of age, and it needed no more than even my childish experience of the world to know that such a look was as piteous as it is happily uncommon in the eyes of girlish beauty at eighteen. That grief should visit the loveliest eyes can hardly be surprising even to a child; but that grief should have made such eyes her home, I knew to be out of the natural course of things. There was no mistaking the sorrow of this face, for any guest of Fancy's who came to spend a casual hour and say good-bye. It was too plain that the guest had stayed there long, and made a home there. Looking at that face now in the afterlight of later years, I can see the traces of Sorrow's old abode. As I lay looking at her, my attendant put the letter in her bosom, and sat still with her hands clasped in her lap, and one or two large silent tears ran down her cheek. A low and timid rap came to the door; and wiping her eyes hastily, she arose and moved noiselessly across the room. There was a whisper at the door; she answered "Yes" in a voice which sounded softer than the whisper, and I was left alone. I fell asleep again, and awoke in the night. A shaded lamp was on the table, and in the grate, a bright but small fire was burning. Beside the fire was a figure so homelike and familiar, that for a minute I almost fancied myself back in the old cottage in the Black Country.

"Sally!" I said, in a voice so weak and ghost-like that I myself scarcely heard it.

But Sally heard it, and turned an anxious face towards me. God bless the face! Plain as it was, love and sorrow dwelt there too, and made it lovable. She rose and came to me, and smoothed my hair and kissed me. I could see that she was greatly moved; but she struggled hard to hide the joy and agitation which this first sign of returning consciousness had brought to her.

"Oh, Johnny!" she said in a whisper, and then gave a great gulp. "Go to sleep, dear. There's a darling. You know me again now, Johnny—don't you?"

"Yes," I said, in that phantom voice the fever had left me.

She stroked my hair again, and resumed her seat by the fireside. But she could not rest there. She came back again, and sat down by the bed-side, and took my hand beneath the bedclothes, and held it. I dozed, and woke to find her there. I dozed again, and woke to find her there. The faithful creature never moved from that affectionate guard except to smooth my pillow or to give me drink. After a fever, one's capacity for sleep is amazing. I fell into sound slumber at last, still holding Sally's hand; and when I awoke again it was broad daylight, and the sad and gentle presence of yesterday was there once more. I could

almost have believed that my interview with Sally had been a dream; for there sat my attendant as if I had only closed my eyes upon her for a second, reading a letter at the window; and the sad attitude of her figure and the expression of her face were as unchanged as if she had been a picture. I moved involuntarily, and she arose and came to me.

"Are you thirsty, dear?" she asked.

"No," I answered, in a stronger voice than I had been able to find the night before; "I am very hungry."

"That's right," she said. "Wait a minute, and you shall have breakfast."

With a caress she went away; and returned after a brief absence with beef-tea and jelly and some long strips of thin toast. In the rear came Sally; and my attendant turning round upon her said,—

"You ought to be in bed, Troman."

"Yes, Miss," said Sally in a whisper; "but let me see him eat a bit, Miss—just a bit—only a little piece, Miss."

The young lady smiled at this; and I thought then that, but for the lasting sorrow in her eyes, the smile would have been a very bright and merry one. It seemed at least as though it had a native right to be so; but the abiding sorrow held it down, and made it sadder than her sadness.

Sally held me up in bed, with a shawl

wrapped round me, whilst the young lady fed me. I have eaten good dinners in good company since then, but I have never since found food so sweet. For a day or two all my chronicle is of eating and drinking and sleeping. Had food and drink and couch been the poorest and coarsest of their kind, I should have found them all enjoyable in the full tide of returning health; but as it chanced that they were of the best that love and money could procure, I revelled in them with absolute physical enjoyment. Sally and the new unknown lady and Aunt Bertha and Cousin Will and Gascoigne, all visited me frequently; and in the presence of each I found a feast of heart, which made that slow convalescence one of the happiest experiences of my life. I learned by-and-by that my new friend's name was Maud, and I could but notice that she and I were included in a common pity and tenderness. People lowered their voices to speak to her, as though she too were weak, and coming slowly back from some heavy illness.

On all half-holidays Gascoigne came to me, with news of my school-fellows—who was trying for this prize and who for that—who was captain of the second cricketing eleven, who made top score, and who took most wickets in the last match against the neighbouring school at Dean. He was an enthusiastic cricketer, and I knew how much he sacrificed in spending all these summer afternoons with me; but he would not be forbidden.

The last of all my little circle to be admitted to my chamber was Polly. The doctor had decided that I might be taken down-stairs next day. He was an odd-looking man, the doctor; not unlike a jackdaw; and he stood by my bedside with a bird-like eye upon me, when the door opened, and Sally made a dart at it with a warning finger raised. "Aha!" he said—"the little lady. Let her come in, nurse. Let her come in."

Polly came in, with round blue eyes wide open; and climbing the bed, gravely sat down upon the pillow.

"Nurse," said the doctor, limping across the room, "you will ask this young lady to be very quiet, if you please.—You will be very quiet, won't you?" He turned on Polly with his bird-like eye, and using his club-foot as a pivot to turn on. "Eh, my dear? Eh?"

Polly nodded gravely.

"That's well," said the doctor, and pivoted himself round on Sally. "No draughts to-morrow, nurse. We mustn't have the little man catch cold."

Pursued by Sally with assurances that the greatest care should be taken of me, the doctor limped from the room, and Polly and I were left alone. In answer to all I asked her, Polly said simply "Yes" and "No," and comported herself altogether with a most supernatural and weighty gravity. The evening was advancing, and the room was growing grey with twilight. Since I

had ceased to question Polly, she had never spoken a word. I was a little wounded. Perhaps illness had made me fretful and exacting, but I could not help thinking that Polly might have been better pleased to find me growing well again. We kept silence until Sally returned, bearing the lamp with her.

"Now, Miss Mary," said Sally, "it's pretty nigh time as you was in bed."

"I s'an't go to bed," Polly answered with calm decisiveness; and looking at her then, I saw that she had been crying, and was crying still.

"Why, Miss Mary," said Sally, "you wouldn't make a worrit in Master Johnny's room, I'm sure, an' him that poorly?"

"Jack," said Polly, suddenly breaking into sobs, and flinging herself upon the bed, "don't be an angel! Oh, don't, don't, Jack!"

"Why, bless your pretty little heart alive, my darlin', no!" ejaculated Sally, raising her.

But Polly would have the assurance from my own lips, and I gave it seriously. I was as unconscious of any element of comedy in that assurance as Polly herself was.

"They'm hearts o' gold," said Sally caressingly —"they'm hearts o' gold, they am, both on 'em."

"If oo goes for an angel," said Polly, fixedly regarding me, "I'll never be a good girl any more." Then she relaxed, and kissed me fondly; and I again announced my intention not to be an angel, and so we said good-night.

Next morning I was dressed and carefully

wrapped up and carried down-stairs like a parcel. I had not seen Mr. Fairholt since the beginning of my illness, and I have learned since then that he had asked no questions about me, and had been apparently oblivious of my existence. When I saw him that day, I was amazed to find how old and grey and withered he had grown. He looked as if he had been as near death's door as I had. I took occasion to ask Sally if he had been ill. She shook her head in answer, and said "No;" but I heard her murmur something about a "peck of trouble" and "poor old gentleman," as she turned away.

Later in the day, when Maud was reading to me, and Polly was sitting on a footstool at my feet, Cousin Will came in, and stayed to hear the finish of The Ugly Duckling. When the story was read through, Maud crossed over to him and sat beside him in the window-seat. They spoke together in low tones for a time; but I heard one fragment of their talk.

"It is possible," he was saying, "that we may learn something from him."

"I fear not," Maud answered.

"We must wait awhile," said Cousin Will.

"It would be unwise," said Maud, "to question him until he grows stronger."

There they both looked at me, and I saw that the latter part of their conversation referred to me. Next day Maud said "Good-bye," and I

was wheeled to the window to see Cousin Will drive her home. She had promised that she would come again and see me very soon; but a fortnight elapsed before we met again. I had not even then recovered my full strength, but all fear of a relapse was long since over; and Sally had told me in the morning that I was to have a good long drive that day. Maud came in a dainty little carriage, drawn by two charming ponies. She had driven alone, as I learned that she was fond of doing; but when we went away together, Cousin Will came with us. I was well wrapped up, and the autumn air was balmy and warm. Oh, the quiet yet exquisite delight of that escape from prisoning walls—the rousing motion as the two bay ponies swept along! The jingle of their harness made a merry tune, and their feet came down in time to it, and birds and trees warbled and murmured in rare harmony. The free wide fields, the rolling river, and the bounteous air, what fresh delight filled them all! A road, so white it made me wink to look at it as we dashed along in the dazzling sunshine, led us at last to a pair of enormous gates of open ironwork, with much gilded scrollwork, and many gilded spikes—the veritable gates of fairyland it seemed within, with the vast house in the distance, whose every window shone so in the sun, that it might have been filled with diamonds and gleamed no brighter; with countless plants and flowers of strange and

splendid form and hue on either side, as we swept up the broad path leading to that noble mansion; and far away to the right a lovely sheet of water, with the latest friends of The Ugly Duckling gliding to and fro upon its placid surface. These things all led to one conclusion; and when a gorgeous creature met us at the door, a being with white hair and white stockings and canary coloured breeches and a sky-blue coat, and instead of ordering us off the premises, received us with all evidence of deep respect, I should have been less than a child had it been less than fairyland, or had Maud been other than a fairy princess.

Within the house we were encountered by a stout elderly man with a bald head and a red face. "Hallo, Fairholt!" this gentleman shouted. "How de doo? This the patient, eh? How's the little feller, now?—Better? That's right. Come in an' pick a bit o' somethin' or other. Lunch is on the table, an' I'm hungry enough for ten men. No blessin' like a appetite, when you've got the stuff to let it loose on." Talking thus he led the way into a great room, before whose glories those of Mr. Fairholt's house grew pale in memory. If I had at this time nothing but memory to fall back upon, I should probably still think this apartment the most magnificent in the world. But my later knowledge of the gilded splendours of Hartley Hall has shown me that they were a little worse than vulgar.

"No news?" said Mr. Hartley—so Will called him—Maud was mincing chicken on my plate, and the old man gave one swift glance towards her as he said it. Cousin Will shook his head in silence; and I, looking at Maud, saw that her lips trembled faintly.

Mr. Hartley ate gravely for a time, and looking up, caught me in the act of staring at him. He dropped his knife and fork with a crash, and laid his great red hands on the cloth and looked at me. "By Jove!" he said slowly, looking round at Will and Maud, "I never see such a likeness in all my life afore. Never!"

"Such a likeness, uncle?" said Maud. "Where?"

"Wheer?" said Mr. Hartley. "Why theer." And taking up his knife again, he pointed at me. "Why, he's the very livin' image."

"Be calm, Mr. Hartley," said Cousin Will, rising and walking round the table to me. "You alarm the child. He is far from strong yet."

"Calm!" said Mr. Hartley, taking up his fork and attacking his plate again. "I'm calm enough. But it's *the* most extr'ordinary strikin' likeness I ever set eyes on in all my born days." He looked at me again and arose from the table.— "Take care o' the little chap, Maud," he said with a gentleness which contrasted strongly with the haste with which he had arisen.— "Here, come with me, Fairholt; I want to speak to you a minute."

Will left me with a reassuring pat upon the

shoulder, and followed Mr. Hartley to the far end of the room, where they talked eagerly together for five minutes.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," said Will, as they came away together towards the table; "I'll drive over at once and bring her with me."

"Finish your lunch first," said Mr. Hartley, ringing the bell.— "Order the dog-cart round at once," he called to the servant almost before the door was opened.

The meal was finished in silence. The footman announced that the dog-cart was in readiness; and Mr. Hartley and Cousin Will left the room together. Maud, in evident surprise and wonder, led me to a couch near the window, and made me lie down there in the sunshine, setting up a firescreen to shade my face.

"Are you strong enough to talk, dear?" she asked me.

I answered that I felt quite strong and well.

"Shall you be troubled if I ask you what frightened you on the night when you fell ill?"

"No," I answered. "I saw a face at the window."

"Gascoigne, your playfellow," she went on, "says that you cried out, 'The face!' Had you ever seen the face before?"

I told her everything then; much as I have set it down at the beginning of this narrative.

She heard me to the end, and then said with voice and eyes of appeal, "If ever you should see him again, dear, don't be afraid of him, but speak to him. No, darling, no; he will not hurt you. It is not in his heart to hurt anything. But he is most unhappy! If ever you see him again, speak to him, and tell him that everybody has forgiven him. Tell him that unless he comes back again, our hearts are broken. Tell him that unless he comes back again, I shall die."

There she fell forward on her knees, and drooped her head against the couch on which I lay, and broke into passionate weeping. The intensity of eagerness with which she had spoken these last words, and the uncontrolled agony of tears in which she knelt, alarmed me beyond measure. I could think of nothing to be done, except to put my arms round her neck and soothe her, and promise that I would—I would indeed. After a time she cried less passionately; and when she had partly resecured her self-control, she arose. "Don't tell anybody of this, darling," she said; "but never forget what I have asked you."

I promised faithfully; and she left the room, still crying, but quite quietly. I sat alone, and wondered at it all, as I think I well might. The unaccustomed exercise of the drive, the hearty meal I had eaten after it, and the agitation of mind I had twice experienced, were too much for me, and by-and-by wonder lost itself in sleep.

When I awoke there were voices in the room, and I had a shawl thrown over me.

"Oh," said Mr. Hartley's voice, "so you've known him since the day he was born, eh?"

"Yes, sir," said a voice, which I knew at once to be Sally's. "I dressed him the very second time as ever he was dressed, sir."

Hearing this, I put aside the shawl which covered me, and sat up. Sally, Cousin Will, and Mr. Hartley were standing together on the rug before the fireplace, and Sally's face wore an expression of anxiety and fear.

"Did you know his mother before her marriage?" Mr. Hartley asked.

"Yes, sir—pore dear! I did, sir," Sally answered. "My mother nussed her when her was a baby."

"Hay?" said Mr. Hartley. "What did you say your name was?—Ah, Troman; of course, of course. Are you old Troman's daughter, that lived in the cottage by the quarry?"

"Yes, sir, please sir," Sally answered, courtesying.

"Well, what was his mother's maiden name?"

"Isabella Hartley, sir," said Sally.

"Who did she marry?"

"Mr. John Campbell, sir, at the Baker's Green Ironworks, sir," Sally answered.

"And he's their only child, is he?" Mr. Hartley went on.

"For sure he is, sir," Sally answered.

"That's what you'd call a chain o' evidence, if you like—ain't it, Fairholt?" said Mr. Hartley, turning round upon Cousin Will, and thrusting a forefinger at his waistcoat.

"It's certainly complete enough," Will answered.

Mr. Hartley turned back to Sally. "Did you ever see his mother's brother Ben, young woman? A blackguard bit of a chap, as run away, an' was never heard on for 'ears an' 'ears?"

"I seen him once, sir," said Sally; "but I never knowed no harm of him, sir. They was all decent people."

"What'll you bet you haven't seen him twice?" Mr. Hartley asked, with a twinkle in his eye.

"Well, I never!" said Sally, in a tone of sudden recognition and surprise.

Mr. Hartley burst into a great roar of laughter, and catching sight of me, stopped suddenly. "An' if here," he said, "ain't my new-found nevew a-listenin' to it all! Why, blow me if it ain't as good as a play! Come an' kiss your uncle, Johnny. Bless my heart alive, missis! sit down and have a glass o' wine. Oh, nonsense, nonsense! Don't stand curtcheyin' as if you was afraid o' *me*. Why you an' me ought to know each other. Your mother and my mother brought me into the world together, between 'em. Well, well, well! Bless my heart alive! An' who'd ha' thought it?"

Sally explained everything to me that afternoon as Mr. Hartley's groom drove us home. When we were landed there, Sally carried me bodily to my bedroom, and setting me down upon the bed, wept over me, according to custom. "And oh!" she cried, at last, holding me at arm's-length by the shoulders, "if heaven ain't a-raising up friends for him everywhere."

My Aunt Bertha went over to Hartley Hall next day, and for a week or two there was a great driving to and fro between the houses. Finally, Sally was added to the list of Mr. Hartley's domestics, on the understanding that she was engaged solely for my behoof and benefit; and I was transferred from the house of Mr. Fairholt to that of Mr. Hartley. Polly and I were alike inconsolable at first; but frequent visits were promised on either side, and once more the barque of Childhood's Hope sailed free before the wind.

CHAPTER XIV.

HISTORY.

You do not need the sanctities of love to hold you pure in heart, as I do.

FRANK'S picture occupies the place of honour on the walls of the Winter Exhibition of the Associated Brotherhood of British Artists. A clique of Frank's friends and admirers go about town

proclaiming the advent of a new Turner; whilst a clique of his detractors go about town proclaiming Frank an impostor, and his picture a pretentious failure. In my capacity as story-teller I have a right to a voice in this matter; and I may take leave to say that the picture is a good picture, and is very near being a great one, and that only a man of genius could have painted it. The World of Fashion, interesting itself in the affairs of British Art, is divided into hostile camps upon this question; and Frank becomes a Lion, roaring mildly in many drawing-rooms; and being growled at in many others, by lesser Lions envious of his fortune. In this mixed world there are many artists who are not gentlemen, just as there are many gentlement who are not artists. It is not surprising, therefore, since envy is a human passion, that some few should go about to accentuate the young fellow's triumph by sneering at him as one who paints with ease to show his breeding. Frank is not without a sense of humour; and since he never envied mortal man anything, and envy cannot sting him, he takes the detraction good-humouredly, and the worship with more inward humility than might be believed.

It is a matter to be thankful for, that in this world the best truths are the tritest. We have reason to be thankful that sin brings punishment in its train. If punishment hang fire or miss, it will be the worse for us. If I sin, let retribution

lay a hand upon me, that I may thereafter live cleanly and learn wisdom. But let it be that the wisdom shall by early learned, for that man's lot in life is terrible from whom sorrow slips like water, and who so needs to be drowned in it before his heart is cleansed. I have laboured but in vain to paint this man, if I have not shown already that with him remorse is the gate which leads to folly, as surely as folly is the gate which leads to remorse, and that for him there must be something little less than a convulsion of the universe, before he escapes that Devil's Circle. Since the night when last we saw him, remorse has been busy with him, and he has made a strenuous effort against himself, and has for the most part succeeded in keeping out of harm's way. It is a good sign in him that praise humiliates him inwardly. Most of all he is humbled by Maud's innocent triumph and gratulation, conveyed by the liveried Cupid of the pennypost, and breathing completest faith and love. He wears the locket which holds her portrait, at his heart, and believes in it as a talisman, to save him from all wrong. And now he has been for so long a time upon the straight path, that but for his last folly he would be quite happy and contented.

On the evening of the first day of the Exhibition he had met the Secretary, a sad-eyed and mournful-mannered man, who was conspicuous as wearing the most shockingly bad hat in London.

"Let me congratulate you, Fairholt," said the Secretary, speaking as dolefully as though he were bidding farewell before transportation. "Lord Chesterwood wants your picture, and will give your price for it. I met him an hour after the place had closed."

"I'm glad to know that Chesterwood likes it well enough to buy it; but I am sorry that I was stupid enough to forget to tell you that it is sold already. It was sold before the Exhibition opened."

"You're a lucky fellow, Fairholt," said the Secretary. "I'll tell his Lordship. Would you take a commission for a *replica?*"

"Not a *replica,*" Frank answered. "A new work, if you like—and if Chesterwood care for one."

With that they parted; and Frank strolling homewards, began to think that he had acted foolishly. Tasker's bill for ninety-eight pounds ten shillings was due in three days' time, and he had nothing in hand to meet it with.

"I must look Hastings up," he said to himself; "and either assure myself that his man is certain, or go back to the Secretary and accept Chesterwood's offer at once."

He called a hansom, and drove to Hastings' rooms. "I say," he cried, bursting in suddenly—"about that fellow who was to buy my picture?"

"*What* about him?" answered Hastings, turning

languidly on his couch. "Is he gathered to his fathers? Has he gone a cropper on "Change?""

"I have come to you," said Frank, speaking seriously, "to ask you about him. It is a matter of vital importance, Hastings. That bill of Tasker's is due in three days. I have just had an offer for the picture from Lord Chesterwood; and if I am not absolutely sure of your man, I must accept it. Now, is your man safe to buy the picture, and safe to pay at once?"

"I should say," responded Hastings with great gravity, "that so far as the possession of coin goes, the Bank of England is a fool to him. And I should be inclined to fancy that if he lost the chance of buying that particular picture, this hollow world could provide him with no future joy. That indeed is my deliberate conviction."

"Will you tell me who it is?" Frank asked.

"An oath, an oath!" said Hastings with placid languor. "I have an oath in Heaven! Shall I lay perjury upon my soul? No; not for Venice!"

"Will you undertake to see the man to-morrow," Frank urged, "and ascertain if everything is right, and if his will to buy the picture holds good?"

"Before the morning dew has bleached the lawn?" said Hastings.

"You unpatented Irritator," cried Frank, shaking him. "Will you go?"

"Yes; I will," said the Irritator. "If not so

swift as friendship's heart could hope, as fast as a hackney carriage can carry me."

"When will you let me know?"

"Before the clock hath struck the hour of noon."

"That's a promise?"

"And shall be a perfomance."

The two shook hands; and Frank, regaining his cab, drove home to dress, and then went westward to be lionised.

At an hour much earlier than that at which he usually arose, Hastings took his way to Acre Buildings, City, and was admitted to the presence of Mr. Tasker, who received him with much cordiality. "I have called," said Hastings, business-like for once, "to ask you about that picture of Fairholt's. I know very well that you have a grudge against him, my chosen one; but you mustn't gratify it yet. With a bill against Fairholt in one hand, and a cheque in his favour in the other, you might be inclined to be mischievous. Have you a genuine commission to buy the picture?"

For a second, Tasker felt as though his ground were slipping from beneath him. The usurer needed time to think a little. There could be no harm in letting Hastings see the intending purchaser's name. He made no answer, but rummaged over a file which he took from an iron safe, and having found the letter for which he sought, handed it over to Hastings. The letter was dated from Hart-

ley Hall, and was signed by Benjamin Hartley. It set forth that since the writer designed a surprise for the artist, it was his wish that the purchaser's name should be kept completely in the dark, and it authorised Tasker to offer four hundred guineas for the picture. Whilst Hastings read this over, Tasker produced a copying-book from the press, and laid before him a copy of his own reply to his patron's missive. Hastings read that also, and professed himself satisfied.

"You won't break your bond with me, Mr. Hastings?" said Tasker when he had put away the letters.

"A scrupulous adherence to veracity is my sole virtue," Mr. Hastings responded, with a return to his common manner.

"Yes, I know," said Tasker, to whom that sentiment might as well have been set forth in Greek; "but you will keep your promise?"

"Have I not told thee so, thou Hebrew Jew?" said Hastings, seating himself upon the edge of the table.

"Very well — very well," returned Tasker, waving his hands in a manner half-deprecatory, half-submissive. "You zay what you like to me; but I will brove that I am your friend. There is drouble in store for you, Mr. Hastings."

"Your argument is cogent, my Israelite," said Hastings. "Experience has taught me to trace the filmy nexus which is here revealed. It's a

singular thing, Tasker, that I never had a friend who didn't say that trouble *was* in store for me. Your advancement of that statement is at once admitted as an admirable augury of the most friendly intentions. I invite you to notice that that sentence is rather well turned than otherwise."

"You are going to be in great drouble," said Tasker gravely, "unless we both dake great gare of you."

"Then let the stricken deer go weep," quoth Hastings, and lit a cigar.

"Mr. Hastings," said Tasker below his breath, "I have been in great difficulties, and I have had to sell every acceptance that was in my hands."

"Good," said the other with an air of approval.

"I have been gompelled to sell yours with the others. And the gentleman was here yesterday to zay that he meant to go for you. Now, Mr. Hastings, this is not my fault. I am a money-lender; but I am not a scoundrel."

"A nice distinction," Hastings murmured as if to himself.

"I break my faith by giving you warning. But if you do not wish to be in trouble, you had better be out of the way for a little while. I can only advise you; but I gould not help it. I was obliged to sell."

Hastings made no response to Tasker's advice or to his professions of sorrow, but surveyed

him with quiet indifference, as though the matter in discussion had no possible concern for him.

"What do you think you shall do?" Tasker asked after a pause.

"I think I shall clear out somewhere, and I think I shall ask you to let me have the money to do it with."

"I cannot let you have much," said Tasher, "but I must do my best."

Then the two set to work to settle the amount on which Hastings should start for Boulogne, since to that refuge for the oppressed he chose for the moment to fly. It was settled that Tasker should send a weekly remittance so long as he should adjudge it necessary for Hastings to remain abroad, and by way of a beginning that gentleman drew twenty pounds, and made his way merrily to Fairholt's chambers.

"All goes well," he told Frank. "I have seen the agent, and I have read the letter of the principal. I suppose you will get your cheque to-morrow or next day."

"For once intelligible and direct," cried the artist, clapping him on the shoulder.

"Yes," said Hastings; "it's all square, old man, and you may rely upon it."

"Better and better!" cried Frank, laughing. "What has worked this conversational conversion?"

"Should you hold the Koh-i-noor—the Fountain of Light itself," said Hastings with solemnity,

"above the flame of a farthing rushlight, its sparkle would be lost. Rub it even with a damp sponge, and its brilliance partially returns. In this little allegory, *I* appear as the Fountain of Light, you as the damp sponge, and a city agent as the farthing candle. Adieu!"

Hastings went his way; and Frank, easy and satisfied in his mind, sat down and penned to Maud the last letter he ever wrote to her. He set down all his hopes and all his love in that letter, not guessing that it was love's last legacy to love. How should he guess it? I cannot tell but before this ink is dry some stroke of terror may have fallen on me. Nor can you who sit at ease beside your fire and read this story make the baldest guess at what the next sixty seconds may do for you. But the proverb is something musty.

"If I were not sure," Frank wrote, "that you love me as truly as I love you, I should despair of telling you one thousandth part of what you are to me. And as it is, I shall never tell you all. You do not need the sanctities of love to hold you pure in heart as I do. Though you loved me as woman never loved man before, you can have no such need of me as I have of you. I shall never have courage to tell you of the follies from which you raised me; of the things, worse than follies, from which your love has had power to save me. And I believe, dearest, that if it

were possible that by any swift temptation—as God knows, it is possible for most men—I should fall from your good hopes of me, the thought that you had loved me once would draw me back again to penitence and honour. Forgive me if I vex you by throwing even a hint of possible mud upon your idol. If that idol were any other human creature, you should believe in him in peace for me; but you can scarcely guess, Maud, how humble and how undeserving I feel before you. I can bring you nothing that makes me worth your having except my love. But I bring that in full measure, pressed down and running over. I am all yours, now, and till I die." This and more he wrote in true love and penitence, and out of the fulness of his heart. There were manlier purposes within him then, than he had ever known before.

At lovers' perjuries, Jove laughs. Ay, well! But if Jove laugh at the vows by which love pledges itself to truth and honour for love's holy sake, or at their woful breaking, then let the meanest creature of the fields deride his thunder. I, for one, will have no such Jove astride on my Olympus.

Frank having despatched his letter, rested with good heart and hope, purposing to make the discharge of Tasker's bill his last business in town. He had no anxieties about that matter. The date for the arrival of the cheque and that for the payment of the bill ran each other a little close,

to be sure; but then there was the time-honoured three days' grace, and he had Hastings' full assurance of the *bona fides* of the unknown purchaser. But the time of reckoning came and went, and no cheque reached him. He went to look for Hastings, and found that he had left town and had given no address. Then, sorely against the grain, he went to visit Tasker. The money-lender lay in wait for him.

"I must ask you," said Frank, "to renew that bill for a month."

Tasker regretted politely that it was not possible. He was already almost a ruined man—he had not twenty pounds in the world. He set forth these statements with more sorrow for Mr. Vairhold than for himself. He would have liked to have helped the gentleman.

"This is all nonsense, of course," said Frank. "I suppose you want a heavier interest. How much do you want?"

No; Tasker wanted nothing but his money. He was broken—he was ruined. There was nothing before him but the workhouse.

"Make the bill one hundred and twenty-five, and make it payable in a month?" Frank asked.

No; it was not possible. Tasker actually turned his back upon him, and sorted a set of dusty papers.

"Make it a hundred and fifty, payable in a month," Frank urged.

Then Tasker turned, with insolent triumph peering through humility. Was the gentleman deaf? It had been said already that the thing was impossible. Tasker wanted his money, and nothing but his money. He was bankrupt without it, and he must have it.

"I am in hourly expectation of more than four hundred pounds," Frank pleaded.

Tasker trusted it would arrive in time to prevent any unpleasantness, holding meanwhile in in his hand the pocket-book which held Benjamin's Hartley's cheque in favour of Frank Fairholt for four hundred guineas. It would not be easy to say how much Mr. Tasker enjoyed his stroke of vengeance.

"What shall you do if the bill is allowed to be finally dishonoured?" Frank asked him.

Tasker—with the joy of the gratified malice brightening his eyes and creasing his lips into their own carnivorous smile, in spite of all he could do to clothe his face in proper sadness—regretted deeply that he could only get some wealthy friend to take it up and appeal to Frank's family.

"If you can get any one to take it up, bring him to me, and I will pay him any reasonable sum he may ask to renew it."

Then Tasker landed his final blow. "I have told you already, Mr. Vairhold, that I am almost a ruined man. Well now you shall know. I am

guite ruined. I gannot help it. I have sold your bill into other hands. It is not in my hands any longer; I have nothing more with it."

Frank redarded him for a minute sternly and thoughtfully. "You want your revenge for the insult I put upon you last summer," he said quietly, but with a feeling of hopeless desperation. "Is that it?"

"Look you, Mr. Vairhold," said Tasker, laying his hand on Frank's sleeve, "if I could—"

"Stand back, if you please," said Frank quietly, regarding the smile which now shone unrestrained on Tasker's face.

"If I could pay myself," Tasker began, retiring a little, "for the money I have lent, I should not gare about revenge. But I will have one or the other. If my friend comes to me and says, 'You have sold me a rotten bill, and told me it was a good one,' then I will not sbare you—no, not a minute. Look you, my young friend—" Tasker laid a hand on Frank's arm again.

The words, the smile, the touch roused Frank into the feeling of disgusted rage one feels at an intruding snake, and in his instinctive passion he struck the Jew across the face with the cane he carried in his hand.

Tasker sprang back with a yell which brought in the office-boy. "Fetch a policeman!" screamed Tasker with a face livid with rage, except for the red bar across his cheek. Frank sat down with

blind passion surging in his heart. Tasker placed his back against the door and glared at Frank, who took up a newspaper from the table and made a feint of reading it. In a minute or two the boy returned with an officer, who listened with imperturbable official calm to Tasker's statement, and then turned to Frank.

"I have punished this person for a gross impertinence," said that young gentleman with quiet hauteur. "There is my card, officer. I shall be quite ready to appear at the proper time and place."

"Very good, sir," said the officer.

"Take him in charge!" Tasker screamed—"take him in charge!"

"You'd better summons the gentleman," said the officer to Tasker.

"No!" Tasker screamed; "he shall go to prison."

The official smiled; and Frank walked unmolested from the room and into the street.

Tasker threatened to report the officer for refusing to do his duty. The officer, with sublime calm, asked if Tasker had the gentleman's address. Yes; he had. Very well then; so had the officer. And with that the officer also walked downstairs and into the street. Tasker raged alone, and swore to a thousand horrible revenges. But when his mood had cooled a little, he rejoiced savagely

that Frank had given him thus a further chance for revenge. He could guess pretty well what it would be to Frank to have his name dragged first through the mud of a trial for assault, on a police-court summons, and next through the daily columns of the press. He ground his teeth and clenched his hands in savage exultation over that charming prospect. With a passion of rejoicing hatred, he took from his pocket-book the cheque for four hundred guineas, and gloated over it.

That Frank should regret the violence into which the passion of the moment had betrayed him, was inevitable; but his regret brought but little added pain to him. Now that he knew how inexorable Tasker had meant to be from the first, he saw that with or without the blow, his case was hopeless so far as the moneylender's influence could go. He was torn with suspense and anguish. The trouble of this unhappy bill magnified itself until it assumed gigantic proportions. Unless it could be met, his father and his brother would each see how he had gone back from his better promises. Maud too—might it not reach her ears? There was an almost unbearable horror in the thought. He had promised so much—he had meant so well—he had fought so hard against the temptations which beset him, and now, a single night of folly had brought him to this. How could he have been such an insensate fool as to place himself in this man's clutches after having

purposely insulted him. O fool! he groaned. Money borrowed drunkenly to pay a gambling debt. A debt contracted, too, in such a place and with such people. Could he go down and see Will, and make a clean breast of it, and beg him once more to help him? There was scarcely time for that; but even if there had been, how could he so humiliate himself? No, no, no, no! A thousand times, No!

There was yet one loophole of escape. To trust longer to the possible receipt of a cheque from a man whose name he did not even know, was out of the question. That had been madness from the first. That hope was the weakest of all broken reeds, and he could lean no longer on it. But there was still Lord Chesterwood's offer, and its recollection came upon him as a ray of light might fall upon the way of safety to one who lay awaiting death in the dark. He arranged his disordered hair and dress, and hurried to the building in which the Exhibition was held. There he found the Secretary, and as calmly as he could set before him the fact that the contract of which he had previously spoken had been made with a man upon whom he could not depend. He should be delighted to sell the picture at once to Lord Chesterwood. His Lordship, the Secretary said, had gone on public business to St. Petersburg. Hadn't Frank seen that in the papers?—No? How very singular. Great pity to deal with unsafe men.

Quite easy to demand a cheque in advance. Lots of people did it, and— Good-day, Fairholt.

No hope—no hope now. Was there any chance of finding Hastings? Away to his rooms once more. No news of him or of his whereabouts. Frank went home again, and poured out a great tumbler of brandy, and drank it. Then he sat down to think; but thought was insupportable. The thought of his father's distress, his brother's contempt—and of Maud—O Maud, Maud! —and her love for him tried by this vile revelation, and her heart bruised by it—it was all too terrible. He took up his pen, and tried to write to his father, and tell him of the miseries which surrounded him, and how they arose. He would have to know, and it was better that he should hear from the culprit—the criminal—yes, the criminal—himself. But Frank tore up letter after letter, and at last gave up all attempt to perform that bitter task. After awhile, he poured out another glass of brandy and drank it, put on his hat and overcoat, and wandered aimlessly into the rain. The winter afternoon was closing in, and the lamps were already gleaming ghastly in the fading light. It was all the same to him where he walked, and he gave no heed to the direction in which he travelled. His feet kept pace with his own fierce and bitter thoughts. But a man must walk fast indeed to outwalk his sorrows. To-morrow, this Nemesis of his folly would be upon him. If Fate's hand could

have fallen then, striking him dead, he would have esteemed himself happy if only he could have been saved this cruel but well-earned shame, and if they who loved him could have been spared the anguish of seeing him so shamed.

I have been looking at the trouble through his eyes, and not my own, all this time. It was not so vast at it seemed to him; but it is easy to philosophise on others' sorrows—even for a fool—hard as it is for the man who suffers to bear his suffering calmly, even though he be a philosopher. And poor Frank, with no one near him to philosophise for him, and with no power of control within, went the way on which his own desperation led him. And that way was the more piteous and desperate because all that was good in him drifted him towards it, and all that was weak in him beckoned him inexorably on.

CHAPTER XV.

HISTORY.

Every man plays Hercules at one time or another.

HASTINGS packed up such of his belongings as seemed needed for a sojourn of a month at Boulogne, and sat down upon his bedside, with a big port-manteau in front of him and a big cigar in his

mouth, to look out the train for Dover. The prospect of the jaunt was pleasant to him. As for his debts, they were such old friends that he would have been almost grieved to part with them. Natively, there was no honester man in Europe than this flippant and idle young gentleman. Tick at Eton and tick at Cambridge had dulled his moral perceptions—that was all. It would be unfair to blame the man for the faults of a whole system. He had been steeped in credit ever since he had been a little boy. That everybody would be paid and exceedingly well paid one day or other, went of course without saying. The young gentleman justified himself after his usual fashion. "The poet remarks with great felicity that there is no joy but calm. Very well, then. It is the business of every man to preserve his life from all fluctuations, and to hold himself at one level. Happy is the man who has no history. My highly superior father holds me in poverty at this time, and will one day burden me with great wealth. It is my double duty to get into debt. To-day's debt feeds yesterday's depletion, and provides a relief beforehand for the repletion of to-morrow. Aha! 'Tis quaintly, wittily, and wisely put. Credit is the compensating balance of the whole system of human affairs. Good again."

Resuming the study of the time-table suspended on behalf of these reflections, Hastings was startled by an unusually imperious knock at the front door.

A foreboding touched him in the midst of his easy gaiety. The door below was opened, and by-and-by the neat and rosy housemaid appeared with a message for him, to the effect that Mr. Robins, of Deal, desired to see him.

"Robins of Deal, and Robins of Deal," said Hastings rhythmically in a sort of pensive chant. "And who the dickens is Robins of Deal?—Show the Old Gentleman up, my dear, as the ardent inquirer said to Cornelius Agrippa."

The rosy housemaid, who was of opinion that Mr. Hastings was the most perfect of his sex, turned up the sitting-room lamp and went down stairs. Then the visitor came up with solemn tramp; and Hastings walking airly into the sitting-room, saw before him an old and faithful servitor of his father's—a servitor so old that he had been pantry-boy in the great house at Dean when his present master was a boy at Eton.

"Why, Roberts, my good old boy," said Hastings, shaking hands with him, "what brings you to the brick and mortar wilderness? The girl said Mr. Robins, of Deal, wanted to see me."

"I told her to say it was Roberts from Dean, Mr. Arthur," said the old man solemnly.

"I am very glad," said Hastings, looking with real pleasure at the white-haired, rosy, plump old fellow's face— "very glad indeed you found me. I am just off for the Continent."

"You must come back with me, Mr. Arthur," said the old man with a solemn shaky voice.

"Is there anything the matter at home?"

"It is appointed to all men, Mr. Arthur," said the ancient butler with a voice more and more tremulous. "It's your poor father's turn, sir, now."

Hastings sat down without an exclamation, and looked hard at his visitor.

"He wouldn't have any of us wire, sir," said the old man, "for fear of startling you. A letter wouldn't have reached you till the morning, and that might have been too late. So he said to me, 'Go and bring him down, Roberts. I shall last till *he* comes,' he said, sir; 'I *must* last till he comes!'"

Hastings still said not a word, but rang the bell. The rosy housemaid answering stood astonished at the paleness of his countenance. He ordered refreshments to be placed before the butler, and then left him and went into the solitude of his bedroom. Standing there, and staring listlessly into the dark and silent street, he groped in his own mind for the meaning of the message which had just been brought to him. He turned his eyes vacantly upon the table near which he stood, and took thence a book in a yellow paper cover, and vacantly read a paragraph. This book was the production of a Frenchman of genius. I will not blame but pity that great personage, who was

a godless, heartless, bloodless cynic, with a rollicking sense of humour which never found food for a smile in anything that was not either cruel or dirty. The paragraph which Hastings thus vacantly read set forth with jocund pleasantries the delight experienced by a young man at a wealthy father's death. As the meaning of the writer became clear to him, he tore the flimsy volume passionately in pieces and dropped them on the floor. The old man tapped at the door, but Hastings did not hear him. He gazed gloomily out of the window on the dark street until the old servitor's touch aroused him. "Roberts," he said, with some bitterness at heart, "I declare I feel this almost as much as you do."

"I know, Mr. Arthur," said the butler. "There's different ways of feeling, and different ways of showing it."

"Is there no hope of his recovery?" Hastings asked, turning again to the window.

"No hope at all, sir," the butler answered.

"When does our train start?" Hastings asked again.

"I've told Hoskins to meet the Hetherton train, one hour and twenty minutes after midnight, sir," the butler answered. "It leaves Euston in about an hour and a half."

"Very well," said Hastings. "Leave me alone for a minute or two, Roberts. Get something to eat. I shall be quite ready."

The butler retired; and Hastings stared on vacantly through the window. "Have I a heart at all?" he asked himself. "I don't believe I care the toss up of a blind beggar's farthing. I don't believe it's in me to care; and if it isn't, it shall not be in me to pretend I care. Poor old governor! He'd have cared if he'd heard that *I* was dying."

His heart was hardened, and his eyes were dry. He thought of things which were so ridiculous that he could have laughed outright at them. The great Frenchman himself could not have been inwardly wittier than poor Hastings, over all the cruelties of his own want of feeling. He could not help it for his life. He could not feel sorry. He was never merrier than at this time; and just as he had arrived at this conclusion, he dropped his head into his hands and wept bitterly. He was a very young man, you will remember, and his father, who lay dying, had loved him well and forgiven him often. The faithful old servitor without, dropped tears into his tea as he sat in his young Master's room, and heard the sobs which shook him.

The two mourners took the train together, and arrived too late. The old man was dead; and his son, that dissipated youngster, was master of Dean Manor and broad lands adjoining. Yet it was not these things which filled the heart which would have fain believed itself so flippant and

cynical. No, no! He lay there, the grey old man, who would be grieved no more, yet had been grieved so often. Even cunning Antony cries out, "My heart is in the coffin there with Cæsar, and I must wait till it come back to me." There was some nature there, or the mob would not have been moved by it. And so Hastings' heart lay there with the dead father, and had no concern with Dean Manor and broad lands adjoining, unless it were to fear in the sincerity of grief that these things would bring in time a consolation of which it would be an honest man's duty to feel ashamed. The will of the dead man was read after the funeral, and except for liberal legacies to the old servants, everything came into the hands of the son. He was free to go back now and use London like a hog-pen or other place to wallow in. He could give his vices that looked like virtues, and his virtues that looked like vices, full swing on such a princely income as his father had left him.

I would defy you to make a Square-toes of this young gentleman, but he is not past making an honest man of. The father's death sobered the son, and brought responsibilities upon him. The old fables are full of wisdom. Every man plays Hercules at one time or another, if it be but for an hour, and the two goddesses solicit him. Happy is he who plays the parable through to the end, and chooses after Hercules his fashion.

That better choice our young Hastings made. It was not in the heart of him to be a Pharisee. He will have his joke to the end of his life, and will not forget, though he grow wise, the flavours of Clos de Vougeot and Habana. There will be cakes and ale even for him who is pious, and ginger shall still be hot in the mouth.

But there is a time for all things, and this was the time for sober thought and honest resolution. He would play Prince Hal no more. Brookes and Bonder, Poins and Bardolph, and that hoary sinner Falstaff, who dwelt in the dingy parlour of the fancy public, that battered hero of the fistic ring, should have seen the last of the Prince's revelry. To purge, to quit sack, and live cleanly—it is a holy task, and the young fellow who goes out to it will have all honest men's sympathy.

Hastings could not bear to closet himself with his dead father's lawyer directly after the old man had been laid beside his ancestors in the family vault. He felt that he could better gve himself a little time for thought, and even a little time for grief, before he took up the burdens of his new position. And there seemed to him a something sordid in hastening to lay hands upon that which bore yet freshly the impress of a hand which could grasp earthly riches no more. Therefore he went up to London, and whilst old acquaintances read gleefully that the will was proved,

and that the personalty was sworn under some quite exceptional number of thousands, he was living alone and thoughtful in his old London rooms. It happened on the night on which he returned to town that he thought of Frank, and took a cab to drive round to him. "It was more than half my fault," he thought to himself, "that Fairholt fell into that man's hands. If he is in any trouble, I must help him out of it."

And once more he found himself too late. Mr. Fairholt had just gone out. Hastings then pencilled this brief note:—

"DEAR FAIRHOLT,—If you are in any trouble about Tasker, let me know. One word from me will quiet him. Yours always, A. H."

This he folded and sealed, and having discharged his duty in that one matter, went home again. Cynical and flippant as he thought himself, his heart was very tender just then, and the look even of lifeless things touched him. The walls that had heard his follies reproached him. He arose and went into the streets. It rained in a half-hearted drizzling way, and he felt lonely and troubled and dispirited. It mattered little to him whither he went, so that he could but walk off this fit of unusual depression, and he found himself almost before he knew it in the midst of all the light and bustle of Oxford Street. Turning thence into quieter ways, he wandered on until somebody fell against him with a shock, and drove

his crape-bound hat over his eyes. He recovered himself, and saw a drunken Irishman, who offered fluent apologies. "For barrin' him," the man was saying, "there's not a creature in the wurld that oi'd lay a little finger on except in the way o' good-fellowship. Will ye take a dhrink? Just to show there's no ill feelin'? Dew now!"

"No, thank you," said Hastings, and walked on.

The man clung to him with repeated apologies and repeated hospitable offers. "Well," said the follower at last, "I dar'n't go tew far away, lest oi should be missin' me friend. If ye won't, ye won't, me boy; an' so, good-noight te ye."

"Good-night," Hastings answered; and the man turned back and lurched down the street. The rain had ceased, and Hastings stood folding his umbrella in dreamy mood, with a sad little laugh at the man's persistent attempt to drink with him. Suddenly, not fifty yards away, there rose a terrific hubbub, and wild cries for help. Towards Hastings, like a dart, ran a stout little figure with guttural yells of "Murder!" Behind him, gaining at every stride, came the man who had said "Good-night" only a minute or two before. What the meaning of the pursuit might be Hastings had no power to divine. It seemed probable that it was a piece of drunken sport on the part of both men, for it was impossible, that they should have had time to quarrel since the Irishman had left him. But the cruel blow which felled the fugitive was

real enough, and so was the murderous knife that gleamed above his postrate figure. Hastings was just in time to bring his umbrella down full swing upon the Irishman's wrist. The knife fell upon the pavement, and the umbrella-stick went to shivers. The man was up in a second, and rushed at Hastings like a bull. It was all uneven. Not half-a-dozen years of foolish living in London and Paris had robbed the prettiest boxer of his day at Cambridge of his style. The tale is as old as the hills. Hastings could not hurt the man severely even had he wished. But on the other hand, the man could not get near him, and his savage rushes were exhausting him and knocking him about a good deal. A gentleman came out of the house in front of which this little drama was enacting.

"Pray, oblige me by picking up this poor fellow," said Hastings quietly, opposing the frantic Irishman with wary foot and hand and eye. "I found this man trying to murder him. There's a knife somewhere."

At the mention of the knife, the Irishman made a rush for the prostrate figure. Hastings dropped in front of him like lightning, and the man went flying over the stooping figure, came down heavily upon the pazement, and lay still. The whole thing had not lasted two minutes.

"Very neat indeed," said the gentleman on

the door-step; and at that moment a constable came with placid mien round the corner.

"Hillo!" said the official; "move on here—I beg pardon, sir. What's the matter?" Before the constable had well made this inquiry, the gentleman had left the door-step, and was bending over the figure of the portly little man who had been first to fall in this affray.

"Ha!" he said; "this is my friend the money-lender, is it?—Help me to carry this man into the hall, policeman." The policeman lent a pair of hands, and the figure of the portly little man was carried indoors. "Now for the other." At that moment of time an elderly fat man came round the corner, and stood still to watch the proceedings. There was blood upon the whitened door-step of the house into which the one man had been carried, and the two gentlemen and the policeman were stooping to raise the Irishman, who lay like one dead doubled against the area railings. The thing wore altogether a melodramatic aspect, and any elderly fat man passing at the time would have been phlegmatic indeed had he not paused to look. The fat man hovered round the three as they bore the insensible figure into the hall, and breathed stertorously in his eager interest. He followed to the door, and there fell into an attitude expressive of profound amazement. Nobody had noticed him, and it is not probable indeed

that anybody so far had even seen him. There was a general start when he cried out aloud, "Why, bless my heart alive, if that ain't my man, Tasker!"

"You know him?" said the gentleman of the house, looking up for a second, and then busying himself about the insensible head again.

"Look here, policeman," said Benjamin Hartley. "You go for a doctor."

The policeman smiled, and whispered, "This is Dr. Brand, one of the most heminent surgeons of the day."

"Ah!" said Mr. Hartley, "that's fort'nate." Then he looked at Hastings. "*You* seem to ha' been in this here shindy, young gentleman."

"For once," responded he, shaken back into his old ways by the incident, "fact and appearance travel together. I *have* been in this here shindy."

"What's it all about?" asked Mr. Hartley, regarding his new acquaintance with some surprise.

"I am really unable to say," said Hastings calmly. "The big man ran after the little one, knocked him down, and drew a knife.—By the way"—turning to the officer—"you will find a knife and a hat outside. Will you oblige me?"—The policeman turned away to the door—"And an umbrella," added Hastings.

"Was it you," asked Mr. Hartley, "as doubled up that cove like that? Again the railings?"

"I had to do it, you know," said Hastings; and Benjamin Hartley stared at him, and wondered. He measured with his eye the figure of the prostrate Irishman, and then looked back at Hastings, with flaxen moustache and flaxen hair and girlishly delicate complexion. A deep-drawn breath and a slow exclamation "Ah!" bore testimony to his amazement.

Dr. Brand hearing this brief colloquy, chuckled within himself. Rising to his feet he said, "This man is rather severely hurt. He ought to be removed to the hospital." A slight examination to the second figure resulted in a similar verdict. "I know the man, too," said the doctor. "His name is Closky, and he lives in Bolter's Rents, in Oxford Street." This was addressed to the officer, who had found the knife, and was offering to Mr. Hastings his battered properties.

"There is no danger, I hope," said Hastings.

"It will not be possible to say anything about that in either case for a day or two," the doctor answered.

The policeman was despatched for stretchers and bearers, and the two disabled men were soon deposited at the hospital. The doctor promised to call there in the morning; and he and Hastings and old Hartley solemnly exchanged cards. Then the old man went off with Hastings to the hospital to see that Tasker was well bestowed. The two took a cab, and so arrived some time before the

wounded. Whilst they waited, the house-surgeon —who knew of Mr. Hartley of Hartley Hall, and had heard of him from afar as a sort of Gentile Rothschild— was overwhelmingly polite, and the old gentleman was full of enthusiasm for Hastings' pluck and prowess. It reminded him—so he said with fatherly pride—of his son the Lieutenant when he was at Cambridge. "Was that Hartley of Jesus?" asked Hastings. "It was, sir," the old man answered, beaming. Did Hastings know the Lieutenant?—Hastings had that distinguished pleasure.

The old man referring to his card again, cries out, "Why, sir, you an' me's neighbours, if I ain't mistaken."—Hastings assented.—"I shall be proud to see you, sir, at 'Artley 'All. My son the Lieutenant 'll be at home at Christmas-time; and my son Orris Sinjin, of Jesus, Cambridge, also. May we look to see you there? No fuss; no show, sir; but a very hearty welcome, I am sure."

Hastings would be delighted. He liked the old man's bluff hearty ways, and his low-comedy gentility, and his innocent bounce and brag.

"Three generations, you know, sir," said the old gentleman with hearty candour. "That's the rule, sir. My young fellers don't make a bad show for the second. Two as fine young chaps as you'd wish to look at." This to the house-surgeon, who nodded with some embarassment.

The wounded men came in at this juncture, and the house-surgeon gave them the benefit of his skill without delay. He called Mr. Hartley's attention to the fact that Tasker's jewellery seemed valuable. "Yes," said the old gentleman in answer; but he was in the habit of carrying about papers which were still more valuable, and it would be as well to make sure that they were taken due care of. Saying this, he took hold of Tasker's coat and emptied the pockets. Amongst other things appeared a very fat pocket-book, the clasp of which was insecure. The book opened in the old man's hand, and a number of papers fell upon the floor. Hastings stooped and picked up some of them, one of which he crumpled in his hand, unseen, and held there.

"Hillo!" cried Mr. Hartley, "here's that cheque of mine, that he ought to ha' paid over a week ago.—I can't take this away with me; can I?" he asked the policeman, who stood beside him.

The official said that was impossible; and the old man, in a state of considerable excitement and anger, called for pen and ink, and producing a cheque-book, filled up a cheque in favour of Francis Fairholt Esquire, for four hundred guineas. Hastings smoothed out the piece of crumpled paper he had held in his hand until now, and laid it before Mr. Hartley. It was a bill for ninety-eight pounds ten shillings, two days overdue, payable

at Lorder and Hobbes' Bank, Lombard Street, and drawn on Francis Fairholt by Aminadab Tasker.

"Hillo!" cried Mr. Hartley again, "this is a damn fine game, this is!—Why, Mr. Tasker," he muttered in a lower voice, "you've been a-detaining of my cheque for something, have you! Very well, sir—very well. When you come round again, I'll have a little deal along of you, as you'll remember."

"I knew of this, Mr. Hartley," said Hastings in a low tone, laying his finger on the bill, "and I knew that Tasker held your cheque for Fairholt. Frank is my best friend, sir; and I went round to tell him that he need not be troubled about this." He laid his finger again upon the bill.

"Thank you, sir," said the old man. "I know that scoundrel, sir. I've told him long ago as if he had any more dealings with Mr. Fairholt I'd break him. I'll go away at once to the poor lad's place and pay him this 'ere cheque. There's three days' grace allowed on this dockyment," said Mr. Hartley, "as perhaps you know, Mr. Hastings, and there's no danger till to-morrow."

"May I come with you to Fairholt's place?" asked Hastings.

Hartley gave a ready assent, and they drove away together. The old gentleman swore as terribly as our army did in Flanders, and poured forth threats against the unconscious Tasker. He

blamed himself for employing Tasker at all, but excused himself on the ground "that there's allays a deal o' dirty work to do in business." "I shouldn't wonder," he shouted, as the cab jolted over the stone pavements, "if that feller as dropped on to him to-night wasn't somebody as he'd ruined." Hastings shouted in return that this was very likely true; and Hartley lay back and muttered new threats and anathemas. They reached in due time the house in which Frank lived, and learned that he had not yet returned. Mr. Hartley asked for an envelope, and enclosed the cheque with one line—'In payment for the picture.—B. H.' Then he turned into the street, still very angry. "I know what lads are like, sir," he said. "I've got two young chaps o' my own, an' one of 'em suffered dreadful through this kind o' thing. And here's a 'igh-minded, sensitive young feller very likely a-breaking his heart through this scoundrel. Well, well, it'll be a warnin' to him maybe. All's well as ends well. He'll be all right to-morrow. —Shall I set you down anywhere, Mr. Hastings?"

The two found that their ways were apart, and so bade each other good-night.

"I like that odd old fellow," said Hastings to himself. "He's new enough; but the new heraldry is hands *and* hearts. I shall look him up some day." Then he fell to thinking of Frank, and made up an honest mind to give his old friend some good advice and monetary help if need were, though

that seemed unlikely. Frank was about to marry old Hartley's niece, and Hastings, like the rest of the world, knew that the builder and owner of Hartley Hall had a colossal fortune.

Mr. Hartley also was preparing good advice for Frank, and was ready to offer monetary aid if need were. "I must come down heavy on him," the old man thought as he lay back in his cab, "and frighten him out o' these wicked ways." There was no sin like carelessness in money matters, in Benjamin Hartley's eyes. Even dishonesty would have been little more reprobated by this good old heathen of a millionaire, for that did but show a perversion of the most estimable of human instincts —the desire to be rich.

Whilst these two friends of his were pondering that good advice and planning that monetary aid which were never to be given, Frank was standing in the night alone at the edge of Hampstead Heath. The wind moaned and the rain fell drearily. A rebellious rage against his evil fortune, a passion of regret for bygone follies, an unspeakable terror of the morrow, and through all these, such real dread of the grief which was coming upon those who loved him—rage, remorse, fear, and love—these four—did battle within his soul. And the wide heath, with the rain and the wind and the night upon it, lay before him like a threat of his own future, storm-tormented, untouched by any ray of light from earth to heaven.

CHAPTER XVI.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY.

I rolled this trophy up carefully.

IT was about the time of my installation at Hartley Hall, that I began to be conscious of a feeling which I have since regarded with some amusement. I began to feel most marvellously old. My experiences of the world seemed to have been so varied that to my own mind I was another Gil Blas or Roderick Random. And I quite seriously believe now that a certain instability, a certain taste for wandering and love of change which mark me as a man, had their natural growth in the kaleidoscopic changes of my early life. When I was in bed and alone, I used to repeat to myself a line of a favourite hymn of Sally's, with a sense of the uncertainty of things in general, which but few children of my age could have arrived at, born of those changeful experiences—"I've no abiding city here." To my novel-reading childhood it seemed natural that aunts and uncles should turn up in a random sort of way, and bring abrupt changes into life; and I was so used to the marvellous, that if Uncle Ben had turned into a magician who traded new lamps for old ones, and had carried his own hall and park into Central Africa, I should

have been inclined to accept is as a fulfilment of the prophecies of my little library. I find that usage has betrayed me. "Uncle Ben." Mr. Hartley was not Mr. Hartley long. I had not been a week in that rawly-splendid mansion before the red-faced, bald-headed old gentleman was my closest chum and had assumed by his own desire that title. He loaded me with silver money, and bought a pony for my use; and though I had no occasion to spend a penny, and had no opportunity, it seemed to afford him the greatest pleasure to chink four or five new half-crowns together, and approaching me with a look of sly jollity, to slip them into my pockets one by one, with many pretences of doing it, between, as though the whole performance were an elaborate conjuring trick. I had grown so rapidly during my fever, that I used sometimes to stand up and look at my own toes with a sense of distance from them such as no person twice my height ever experienced. But in spite of this, the pony's rotund girth was something too much for my small legs, and for a long time I sat him with a precarious balance and a sense of insecurity. Uncle Ben used generally to walk beside me, and not infrequently Maud would take the bridle on the other hand, and so we three would ramble slowly through the park together, one of us in a state of nervous transport, and unwitting of the troubles of those who walked beside him. One day when the grass was crisp with the

frost of winter, and the brown leaves dropped from the trees without a breath of air to shake them, as though they released themselves of their own will, Uncle Ben and I went out together. Maud was out to join us, but he waved her back, and following her, said something, in answer to which she nodded sadly.

When he had led me some distance through the park, my companion looked at me and said, "Johnny, my lad, Sally's a-going down home to see her mother. Should you like to go with her?"

"Yes, indeed I should," I answered; and hoped that nothing was wrong in Sally's affairs.

"No, Johnny," said Uncle Ben; "theer's nothin' wrong. While you're theer, Johnny, if Sally asks you to show her—" There he stopped in his speech and arrested the pony. He looked thoughtfully at me, and then laughing at my puzzled face, touched me on the cheek, and said, "Never mind that now. When Sally asks you anythin', why it'll be time enough to answer—won't it?"

I said I supposed it would; and he turned the pony's head round, though we had not been out a quarter of the common time, led me back to the front of the house, lifted me down without a word, and left me standing at the door. I had not been there long, when Hawker—the Splendour in the canary-coloured plush and sky-blue coat, whom I had seen on my first visit, and had since grown familiar with—came to me and informed

me that I was wanted in the morning-room. Thither I went, and found Maud, who told me that Sally was going to start in an hour from then, and that she was expected to return, bringing me with her in two or three days' time at farthest. Somehow, there was a reservation in her manner—children are quick to read such things—as if she desired to say something and yet would not say it. I had seen something of the same sort in Uncle Ben. When Sally came, there was an air of mystery about her of an almost melodramatic cast, and she palpably dissembled, like one behind the foot-lights. She wore so absurd a pretence of being in her usual humour, that I was quite alarmed at it. Whilst the groom drove us to the railway station, I revolved the problem in my mind, and was persuaded before we got to the train that some new change of life was in store for me. I did not believe that Uncle Ben had tired of protecting me, for he had worn his most genial and affectionate look at parting, and had studded me all over with new half-crowns, setting me on my back on the sofa in order to do it, and laughing at me merrily the while. I was sure of Maud also; and as for Sally, I was as convinced then as I am now that that good creature would be a consenting party to nothing which would harm me; and yet I felt persuaded that something new was about to befall me by the consent of all of them, and was in a nervous tremor to know what the something

could be. I asked no questions, and Sally went on with her pretence of there being nothing the matter, with as much success as any bandit who ever ostentatiously concealed himself upon the boards.

The great manufacturing town lifted its chimneys into the pall of smoke which they themselves created, and its streets had the old roll and clamour and bustle. Sally took me into a great confectioner's shop there, and gave me cakes and tea, and was very deferential to the waitress who attended us. I was a little awed also, remembering distinctly the petticoated figure who stood so strangely for me in memory, and who had first seen the place, and thought what a palace it was a year ago. I was very smartly dressed now, and booted and gloved in the nattiest way, so that I rather pitied that little figure. But I could not dissociate him from myself, and felt that I laboured under his special disabilities. The mistress of the establishment, a motherly-looking old lady who rustled her black silks with an air of great importance, came over and asked Sally whose little boy that was. Sally responded respectfully. It was the only son of Mr. John Campbell of the Baker's Green Ironworks. The old lady looked gently towards me, and said in a whisper that in that case I was an orphan.

"Yes," said Sally.

"Who is he living with?" the old lady asked again.

"He's livin' along of his uncle, ma'am," Sally answered, "at Hartley Hall."

"Mr. Benjamin Hartley?" said the old lady—"the great millionaire?"

Sally answered in the affirmative.

The old lady, after taking a long look at me over Sally's head, went away again; and I heard her whisper to one of the waitresses behind the long marble counter that I was nephew of Mr. Hartley of Hartley Park, the great millionaire; and this whisper going round to all the marble-topped tables, I became conscious that I blundered with my tea, and had no idea as to what I ought to do with my eyes and hands.

Sally was also a little discomfited by this general inspection; and when at last we rose to go, and I produced a big-clasped Russia-leather purse, which Uncle Ben had given me that morning to hold the new half-crowns in, the general public of the place was painfully interested in this glimpse of a portion of the great millionaire's money, and I was very glad to escape with Sally to the street.

The dusk had fallen when we got to the railway station again in time to meet the train which bore us to my native place. There was only one old gentleman in the second-class carriage in which we rode, and he was looking out of the window. I suppose that I spoke louder than I had

intended, for when I asked Sally what a millionaire was, he looked round.

Sally not being specially ready at dictionary definitions, responded, "Why, your uncle's a millionaire, my darling."

The old gentleman turned round so sharply again that he knocked his hat off.

"Is that young Master—er—er—Master—"

He snapped his fingers impatiently, as if he had forgotten a familiar name.

"Master Campbell, sir," said Sally, helping him out.

"To be sure," said the old gentleman,—"Master Campbell. He's the nephew of—er—"

The old gentleman snapped his fingers again, as if he had forgotten a familiar name.

"Mr. Hartley, sir, of Hartley Hall," said Sally, helping him out again.

"Of course," said the old gentleman. "Bless my soul! yes, of course. Dear me!"

He put on a pair of glasses to look at me, and again I felt disconcerted, and had trouble with my roving eyes and hands. We got out at the same station, and the old gentleman seized an official in a gold-bound hat upon the platform, and pointed me out to him triumphantly as though I were a marvellous curio. "That's the nephew of the great millionaire, Hartley of Hartley Park, you know."

The official person came forward, and stooped

down at the door which led from the platform, and stared at me under pretence of asking me for my ticket, and I felt that I was an impostor, and was making some pretensions—I did not know how—to something that did not belong to me.

Outside the station Sally commanded a fly, and we drove away through the familiar streets in which the same dull gas-lamps gleamed, and the same people went to and fro as of old. They were all the same, streets and people and shops, except that a tinman had opened a new establishment with plate-glass windows, in which the bright tin-ware glistened like silver. This one alteration made the whole place seem new and strange in the midst of all its familiarities. We were not long in reaching the rough and broken road in which the cottage stood. Looking from the windows of the fly, I could see the mounds of slag and cinder which lay solemnly, like real hills, behind it, when the driver halted and got down, and said he could drive no further, because there was what he called a "crowning sin" in front of us. By this we both understood him to mean a crowning-in. The land had given way and had fallen into the hollow left by some disused coal-mine—had *crowned-in* the country people say—an occurrence by no means uncommon in the district. I had often gone to look at places where such landslips had occurred, creating great rugged gaps which looked like Alpine valleys to my childish eyes.

The driver said he knew the way round, and for an extra fourpence undertook to pilot us and carry the portmanteau. We went cautiously in the darkness, and the lowering sky looked *bare* to me where some old trees had stood when I knew the scene so well. When we came to the cottage, it was made evident that our arrival had been expected. Sally's mother had spread upon the table a clean white cloth, which I knew by old experience to be reserved for occasions of high ceremony; and crockery-ware for three was laid upon it. The wrinkled old woman, in her black stuff dress, her apron of blue check, and her white cap, ran up the steps from the kitchen, and hugged Sally and kissed her and cried over her.

"You'll ha' lots o' time for that sort o' game inside," the driver suggested, deriding sentiment; "gi' me my ha'pence, an' I'll toddle."

Nobody taking immediate notice of the driver, he walked into the kitchen with the portmanteau, lit his pipe at the fire, and looked at us all three with an aspect of benevolent interest, until Sally remembered him, and paid him out of the Russia-leather purse, when he regarded his money with deep scorn, and took his way dejectedly. Old Mrs. Troman depressed me at first by courtesying to me, and treating me as a visitor of high importance; but her disposition to regard me in that light wore off by-and-by, and we fell into the old ways, sitting by the fire, she and Sally talking,

and I keeping my own fancies in wandering company, or listening, as I chose.

It was still plain to me that Sally had something on her mind, which she strove to disguise; and when her mother said to her suddenly after a lapse of silence, "An' now tell us what you come down for?" my faithful servitor's assumption of having had no special purpose was the greatest failure in the way of private theatricals which I can remember. Conscious of the defeat of her purpose, Sally roused herself, and bustled me off to bed with a great air of kindly authority. I lay in the old room and seemed to slip back into the old life again, though with a sense that it was all narrower and smaller than it had once seemed to be. It came back completely and without that reservation in my dreams, but the room looked very bare and small and poor in the morning, though I felt myself in some indistinct way ungrateful when I thought so. It was only grey daylight when I awoke, but I got out of bed and dressed myself, and then looked out of the window, from which I could see that corner of the crowning-in. Naturally interested in that phenomenon, I ventured downstairs, and after a struggle, succeeded in opening the back-door, through which I gained the road, and in a minute came upon the edge of the landslip. It was far deeper and wider than is common in such cases. It often happens that the earth sinks so gradually, that what was a

gentle hill becomes a gentle hollow without the visible breaking of one clod of earth; but in this instance the road and the field on each side of it had gone suddenly, carrying the hedges clean out of sight, and leaving the trees I had missed the night before head-downwards, with their roots sticking out forlornly from the broken soil like helpless arms. Here was an opportunity for exploration which no boy could have resisted. I clambered down into the hollow, growing rather clayey in the process; but evoking—in true child-fashion—more fancies from my descent than any grown poet could get out the descent of the Andes; and came by-and-by upon the roots of the first tree. This tree I knew again at once by the peculiarity of its form. Even its present topsyturvy attitude could not disguise it. The trunk, as I remembered, used to rise in two distinct columns which blended half-way up, and formed an inverted V as they leaned towards each other. As a mere baby, I had crawled under that V many a time, and found it an admirable hiding-place. I climbed up now, by the hanging roots, and looked down at the old seat. In one place the clustered roots were so thickly filled with earth that they made a sort of platform, and to this, with some little difficulty, I climbed. Whilst I stood looking about me from this point of vantage, the slender roots bent under my weight, and I slid slowly down, without in the least hurting myself, but also with-

out power to help myself, until I had reached the cleft of the tree, where I laughed aloud to think what a slide I had had.

I found it not altogether easy to extricate myself, and in my final struggle caught my foot in something which threw me down, so that I had a harmless tumble out of the tree cleft into a little clayey hollow which lay on one side below it. Rising from this second slip much besmeared, but still laughing, I found that I had brought something with me which entangled my feet. It turned out to be a shirt, very much besmeared, and to my amazement I discovered on turning it over that the front and wrists were decorated with studs and links exactly like those worn by Uncle Ben. I rolled this trophy up carefully, and without stopping to think of my besoiled aspect, went hotly up the broken hill-side over the road and towards the cottage. Sally was about by this time, and cried out "Heaven a mercy!" when she saw me coming. When I showed her my treasure-trove, which I did at once before she had time to scold me, she threw it away with an exclamation. "Mercy on us, child! Don't bring your old rags here, you dirty boy!" But I recovered the shirt with more resolution than I was commonly master of, and showed the studs, when Sally sat down on an upturned tub which happened to be near us in the yard, caught feebly at the pump handle, and cried, "Bless us

and save us!" Seeing that I had made an impression, I followed it up with the statement that I had found the shirt in an overturned tree on the landslip. She was greatly agitated, and asked me if there had been anything else there. Nothing that I had seen, I said.

"Run away back, and see," said Sally, taking me by the shoulder. "Run away while you're dirty."

She herself arose, and together we crossed the yard, and made for the place. I clambered down this time by an easier way than I had first taken, and Sally followed me. When we came to the tree, she said, in a quick excited way, "I remember. A reg'lar cave to hide anythin' in. Let me lift you up, Johnny." With that she took me in her arm, and lifted me towards the hollow. I caught at a root, and scrambled up easily, and by this time, quite as excited as my companion, looked about on every side. "What's that you're treading on?" cried Sally from below. I looked down and saw a garment half revealed beneath a fall of loose earth. Extricating it with some little trouble, for the foothold was narrow, I threw it down, and came upon another, which I sent after it. There was nothing left, and I got out of the cleft again, Sally's arms receiving me. When we reached the cottage yard, she shook the clothes free of the rough earth which clung to them, and laid them on the ground, and there gazed at them

with an expression in which many emotions were blended.

At this moment Mrs. Troman came upon the scene, and testified to the greatest surprise at our appearance. "Well—if—I—ever did!" said the old lady. "Why, our Sarah, a body might think as yo'd gone crazy."

Inviting her mother to accompany her, Sally gathered up the besoiled clothes, and went indoors and upstairs. The old lady, after another ejaculation over me, followed her. A few minutes later, whilst I stood at the sink in the kitchen making myself elaborately muddy in the attempt to clean myself, and marvelling greatly at Sally's excitement, Mrs. Troman appeared again, and subjected me to the well-remembered ordeal by water, then laid out clean garments for me from the portmanteau, and sent me upstairs. I was at first so filled with wonder, that there was no room within me for curiosity, or I might have made some inquiry as to the reason of Sally's emotion. When I had dressed and descended to the kitchen, I found that she had left the house. The old lady, who had recovered her familiarity, and her old sense of control, as I now believe, by the mere fact that she had had me once more under her hands at the pump, told me in answer to my inquiries that "children should speak when they was spoke to;" and by that rebuff left me with no other employment than to look at and listen to the old moni-

tory clock, which shook its palsied little finger at me sixty times a minute in quite the old fashion, and ticked reproof and loneliness. When the palsied little finger had travelled sixty times round the fatuous countenance in the middle of the clock face, Sally returned perturbed and pale, and we sat down to breakfast together. Mrs. Troman had at one time held the post of cook in a gentleman's family; but on this occasion the eggs were pebbly in their hardness, the ham was uneatably smoked, and the coffee was in such a condition that it would have satisfied the gentleman in the old Joe Miller story, who, drinking it for the first time, mistook it for a new sort of porridge, and complained that his companion "had all the thick." I had felt the lash of Mrs. Troman's tongue many a time; but Sally until that morning had never addressed to me one word of harshness. When in the course of the meal she fell with sudden spitefulness upon me and boxed my ears, without reasonable provocation, I retired from the table, and sat on the upturned tub in the yard in a condition of stony heartbreak, for which my memory could find no parallel. After a time she came out in tears, and kissed me, and protested she hadn't meant it; but that she was that worrited with one thing and another, that she declared she didn't know which way to turn. "An' that I should have struck you causeless, Johnny, my darlin', it does go reg'lar to my 'art." So she protested

weeping. "Be a man," she urged with tears, "and say it didn't hurt you, Johnny, dear."

I became as manly as I could at so short notice, and declared that it had not hurt me, whereon Sally wept anew and said I was a heart of gold. Matters being thus satisfactorily settled, I was led indoors again; and Sally having wiped her eyes, put on her bonnet and shawl, washed my tear-soiled face and took me out of the cottage, leading me in the direction of the village, until we found the fly in which we had travelled the night before standing by the roadside. We both entered that ramshackle vehicle, and the driver, without waiting for instructions, rattled away with much noise but at no great pace towards the railway station. The singular and untoward events at the breakfast table had disinclined me for wondering about anything, and I did not at all trouble myself as to where we were going. The fly stopped before the door of the *Ward Arms*—there was a *Ward Arms* or *Dudley Inn* in every parish of the Black Country in those days—and we alighted there. The waiter at the door walked in front of us without speaking, as though he knew our business, which was a great deal more than I did, and marching sedately up stairs, led us into a room in which my Cousin Will stood alone with the stained garments I had that morning discovered, spread on the table before him. He looked at me with the kindly smile

which was common to him, though his eyes were troubled when I entered and grew sad again a moment later. "I want to ask you some questions," he said gently, "and I want you to be as careful as you can in answering me. Did you see a stranger who frightened you very much, nearly a year ago, down here?"

"Yes," I said, beginning to wonder if I had been brought here on purpose to be asked.

"Can you remember on what day you saw him?"

"It was the day," I answered, "when Aunt Bertha first came to Mrs. Troman's house."

He referred there to a note-book, and nodded slowly to himself once or twice before he went on: "How was he dressed?"

I saw his eyes turn to the garments on the table, and in a moment I knew them. "He wore those things," I cried, "and a hat like the one that hung on the hat-stand at your house."

"What did he wear when you saw him next?" he asked. His face was very pale, and there was a suggestion of a memory in it if I could only have grasped it—something I had seen in a dream in my illness—no—yes—the face of the man about whom he questioned me. "What is the matter?" he said, with a kindly hand upon me.

"Nothing," I answered; "only—his face was

like yours just then, and like—like Mr. Fairholt's the night he went to London."

Sally and he exchanged looks.

"What did he wear when you saw him the second time?" he asked again.

"He was dressed like a common man," I said, "in thick clothes and heavy boots."

"Were you with Aunt Bertha when you saw him that time?"

"Yes," I answered; "and he saw her, and shouted something, and then ran away."

"So near," he murmured to himself—"So near!" Then after a pause: "You saw him once more, didn't you, Johnny? How was he dressed when he looked in at the window at home? Had he the same clothes as when you saw him here?"

That question I could not answer. I remembered nothing but the face.

"What made you remember the face?" he asked.

"It frightened me," I said—"his eyes and teeth."

He nodded sadly, as if to signify that he understood me, and sat down, resting his forehead on his hand. Sally absently smoothed the soiled garments lying on the table. After a pause he rose again and asked me if I could show him the exact places in which I had seen the stranger. When I answered in the affirmative, he bade me come with him, and left the room—Sally and I

following. We all got into the fly; and from my description of the clay-pit Sally told the driver where to go. We sat in silence as we lumbered along, and after a time Sally stopped the vehicle near a stile, beyond which lay the scene of the first adventure recorded in these pages. Cousin Will inquired carefully as to the direction from which the stranger came, but of that I could tell nothing. Then he inquired with equal closeness as to what main or by-roads could have brought him here, and there Sally's local knowledge came into play, and she told him all she knew.

He paced up and down the walk for a time, and then came back and addressed us. "It is a poor clue," he said, "but it is something. I don't think I shall want you again, Troman.—Good-bye, Johnny. I shall see you, soon, at home." He waved his hand and walked away slowly down the path. Sally looked wistfully after him, and in a little while turned away, taking my hands in hers.

We went back to Hartley Hall next day. Nobody questioned me there, or made any observation on my absence, except to welcome my return. And I was left with a new link in that strange romance which only the years completed for me—a story leading nowhere, and therefore everywhere—a tragic story, to which, before I could read it truly, I gave many wild beginnings and conclusions.

CHAPTER XVII.

HISTORY.

"It's ninety-eight pound ten," said the rueful man.

HERE let the Muse who guides this chronicle introduce to the reader the host of the *Spotted Dog* in Bloomsbury. Mr. James Groves had by nature no more right to a place in a romance or a tragedy than the Derby Dog to gambol in the Elysian Fields. He was a pale and pimpled young man, of weedy growth, and his hair and eyebrows were of a faint primrose colour. He was great in the matter of pins, and scarfs, and fancy waistcoasts. His father had been a pugilist, and had fulfilled the ordinary fate of gentlemen of his profession, who, being first over-trained, are afterwards not trained at all, and, settling down in a public-house to enjoy the *otium cum dignitate* of their lives, take to drinking, and so sink to an unheroic close. With such an ancestry—it might be invidious to trace it further—Mr. James Groves might naturally be regarded as an authority on sporting matters. Many matches, of all sorts, and for amounts large and small, were made in his house, and the *Spotted Dog* was indeed the chief rendezvous of the sporting contingent in London. I have indicated that Mr. Groves was not by nature intended for a place

in written romance or tragedy. But one man in his life plays many parts. The heavy villain of real life has little in common with his prototype of the lending-library and the theatre. Poor old King Lear lets you know, when you spend an hour with him, that the convulsions of a kingdom have brought about the hanging of the court fool along with other matters. Fate pitchforks people about in an inexplicable way, giving this foolish youngster a place in a tragedy, and that venerable philosopher a part in a farce.

It befell that on the morning of the day on which Frank Fairholt wandered in desperation on to Hampstead Heath, and stood there lonely and half-mad in the rain, Mr. James Groves arose and adorned himself with much jewellery; and drove in a high dog-cart, in the society of two congenial spirits, to the *Spaniard's Inn*, a hostel known to fame, and celebrated in the fiction of that chaste and elegant author, the late Lord Lytton. Here the trio bestowed the high-stepping steed and the dog-cart, and, after refreshing themselves with certain liquids, they took their unostentatious way to the house of a gentleman in the neighbourhood. This gentleman lived for no other end than "sport," and was one of those peculiarly constituted people who find their keenest pleasure in witnessing the combats of the lower animals. That is the formula. But for fear of misconstruction, I should have preferred to say the higher animals.

The egotisms of humanity shall, however, be respected; and although I have my own opinion as to the relative values of this gentleman's life and those of the rats, dogs, and birds he induced to slay each other, there is no need to impress it on my reader.

There may have been perhaps a score of sporting gentlemen around the cockpit when our trio arrived at it. The brutal restrictions of British law even in those days were extended to the manly sport of cock-fighting, and considerable care was taken by the gentleman at whose house the present "main" was held, to shroud their pleasure in the profoundest secrecy. No interruption befell the refined enjoyment of the day. Mr. James Groves, an admitted authority upon the matter in hand, found many people who were rash enough to bet with him, and having netted a considerable sum of money, was in unusually high feather. When the main was over, and the greater part of the witnesses had quietly dispersed, Mr. Groves and his friends stayed and had luncheon with their host. In the course of the luncheon, Mr. Groves launched out in enthusiastic praises of the high dog-cart—which was a new product of the art of Long Acre—and of the high-stepping mare, which had been purchased by the lamented Groves senior, a notable judge of horse-flesh, and was famed for having repeatedly trotted a mile in some quite incredibly small number of seconds. These things

to hear did the host of Groves Junior seriously incline, and being blessed with the two things which Groves Junior most admired in others—money and credulity, namely—burned to possess the marvel of a dog-cart and the high-stepping mare of fabulous achievement. This flame of desire being artfully fanned by Mr. Groves' friends, and Mr. Groves himself declaring with much emphasis that he would sooner be boiled alive than part with either of those his properties, the host determined upon an ocular inspection of them, and despatched his own groom to the inn, with orders to bring the matchless mare and unprecedented dog-cart round. This done, he inspected them both with the aspect of a profound connoisseur, and, by way of establishing his own cunning in the matter of horse-flesh and dog-carts, admired the pair so highly that Mr. Groves was at length compelled, with many sounding asseverations of his sorrow, to part with them at something like twice their highest value. A formal receipt was drawn up and signed, a cheque handed over, and the transfer was complete.

"And now," said Mr. Groves, "how am I a-goin' to get 'ome, my pippings?"

This query accorded well with the host's simple ideas of humour, and he laughed loud and long. Mr. Groves, with great geniality joined in the laughter, but his friends, who had not especially profited by this transaction, "relucted," as the

Great Essayist puts it, at the idea of walking home.

"I can put two of you fellers up here," said the master of the house, "but I can't find room for all three of you."

Mr. Groves had an important engagement at a most absurdly early hour in the morning, and must go home that night. Would the host let his groom drive him over?— "No, he wouldn't," said the host, and added humorously, "Let him walk. It would do his legs good."

"I'll tell you what we'll do, Grovey," said one of Mr. Groves' friends. "Bobby and me'll stop here to-night; but we'll walk with you as far as the top of the Spaniard's Lane, and there you're bound to be able to get an 'ackney coach, you know."

This programme was accepted; and in the lowering dusk the three set off together. They had not gone far when the rain began to pelt down sharply, and they took refuge at the inn. The rain rather increasing than failing in force, after the space of an hour passed in the consumption of alcoholic liquors, Mr. Groves announced himself as "gettin' a leetle peckish," and proposed a steak with onions. His companions, who were pretty generally willing to eat or drink at any man's expense, fell in readily with his views, and another hour went by. By this time none of the three felt at all inclined to move.

"You landed a bit on the main, didn't you, Bobby?" asked Mr. Groves from his side the fireplace.

"Five flimsies," his friend responded sententiously.

"What did *you* fetch out of the pit?" asked Mr. Groves of his other companion.

"Oh," said he, carelessly, stirring his grog as he spoke, and sipping it, "I won about twelve pound."

"I don't quite know what I won," said Mr. Groves; "I'll see." And suiting the action to the word, he drew his chair up to the table, and produced a little chamois-leather bag containing gold and notes, and throwing this on the table, where it fell with a pleasant muffled jingle, he began to count its contents.

Whilst the gambling, horse-chanting, cock-fighting trio sat over whisky-and-water at the hospitable fireside of *The Spaniard's,* one solitary and melancholy figure plashed about the roads of the heath in the darkness and the rain. For poor Frank, the pillars of the world were shaken, and chaos had come again because of the want of a trifle less than a hundred pounds. Emotions in a nature like his are very changeable, and he had now come to a blind, angry rage at Fate, who had thus cruelly waylaid him. How bitter and how hard it was, you may partly guess. His penitence had been sincere, his reform earnest, his

struggle with the worse half of himself severe and constant. He had striven honestly after virtue, had banished his besetting sin of idleness, and had crowned himself publicly with hard-earned laurels; and here and now, in the very flush of his triumph and the confidence of his hope, his dead vice and folly came to life again, and laid their hands thus heavily upon him. He saw father and brother and lover broken-hearted; his delicate vanity heard already how the town rang with his disgrace. Then he could bear the thought of these things no longer; he fell into a dull desperation, and in that mood tramped on through mud and rain until he came upon a gleam of light, and seeing that he stood before an inn, bethought him suddenly of how tired and wet he was, and so entered. He called for a glass of hot brandy-and-water, and threw his wet coat and dripping wide-awake over a chair by the fire.

"Will you walk in here, sir?" said the landlord, throwing open a door.

Frank accepted the invitation; and entering the room, saw three men standing at a table, two of them laughing, and one somewhat ruefully regarding a small pile of gold and two or three notes which lay before him.

"Well, *now*, how much is it, Jemmy?" asked one of them.

"Why, it's ninety-eight pound ten," said the

rueful man, with an exclamation which need not be chronicled.

Ninety-eight pounds ten? Those words had been ringing in Frank's ears all day. After his exposure to the rain, and his long tramp in the darkness, he felt a little dazed and dream-like on his sudden entry to the warmth and light of the room. The sough of the wind, and the plash of the rain, and the noise of his own monotonous footsteps were yet in his ears. He was scarcely certain that his fancy had not played some trick upon him in the repetition of this haunting phrase. But he had barely seated himself when the man repeated it ruefully. "I'd have bet twenty to one," he said, "that there was a hundred pound there."

"Well," said one of his companions, "you *did* bet two to one as there was a hundred pound there. Hand over a couple of sovs. Thankee."

"Hand over," said the third man, laughingly.

The loser paid both claimants from his purse. "I'll carry this here ninety-eight pound ten home as I got it, anyway," he said, and raked the money towards him, and bestowed it in his chamois-leather bag. "Oh, you fellers can grin as much as you like; but I've done a pretty good day's work, takin' it altogether. I've made pretty near a couple o' hundred out o' that little bargain, my boys, and I pulled ninety-eight pound ten out of the cock-fight—"

"Sh!" said another, looking across at Frank.

Mr. Groves was somewhat inflamed by liquor, and chose to be very loud and lordly over this interruption. "Look here, Mr. 'Sh!'" said he, with semi-drunken importance, mimicking his companion. "I'm taking it for granted as I'm a-talkin' among gentlemen; an' if any gentleman over'ears me a-remarkin' as I've won ninety-eight ten to-day on a cock-fight, why, so he may, and welcome. I don't suppose as anybody here is a-going to lay a criminal information; but if anybody is, why, my name's Jimmy Groves, and I'm the landlord o' the *Spotted Dog* in Bloomsbury, and what I say I stick to."

"Oh, all right!" said the other, shrugging his shoulders deprecatingly. "Say what you like."

"Well," said Mr. Groves, elaborately desirous to justify himself, "I'll leave it *with* the gentleman. If a man's won ninety-eight ten on a cock-fight, and he says so, fair an' square an' plain, without palaver, mind you, what's the odds? I didn't say wheer the cock-fight was—did I, stupid? I leave it to the gentleman—Did I say wheer the cock-fight was, sir?"

Thus accosted, poor Frank responded that the gentleman seemed to him to have spoken most discreetly, and to be admirably worthy of his high good-fortune. This speech, which fed the bitterness of his own heart, put Mr. Groves into a great state of good-humour, and he refought the great

encounter of the morning, whilst Frank sickened at him. Whilst he sat there and heard this drunken cad relate his brutal story, the yong uman thought how wild was the fashion in which Fortune distributed her gifts. Frank looked at this pimpled and bejewelled young publican, and felt very bitterly towards him. "This howling drunkard," he thought, as he looked at him, "has made to-day, by his presence at that degrading spectacle, the very sum of money the want of which will be my ruin at noon to-morrow. One can hardly believe in Providence in the face of it." Frank became half-frightened at his own thoughts, so dark they grew. He called for more brandy, and drank it; and then passed into the outer room, put on his overcoat and hat, and went out into the darkness and the rain again. He tramped along slowly, so wretchedly absorbed that he scarce knew where he went. He filled and li his pipe mechanically, and coming to a gate, threw his elbows on it, and lounged there unconscious of the night, or not caring for it, and smoked as he looked across the gloomy fields.

As he leaned there, he heard loud voices coming up the lane, startling the dreary night with tuneless song. *We won't go Home till Morning* refused to blend with *Auld Lang Syne* and *The Bay of Biscay*. Frank, half-hoping that the would go by in company, and save him from the demon who tempted him, drew nearer to the hedge at the

side of the gate, and stood still there. The voices and the footsteps ceased awhile, and then he could hear the murmurs of conversation. Then two voices went away, and one came nearer, unmusically roaring "For he's a jolly good fellow." As the owner of the lonely voice came on and reeled past the gate, Frank knew him for the man who had been boasting of his winnings. "That blackguard," thought Frank, "has in his pocket the very money which would save my whole life. Would it be theft to take it from him, and send it back when my cheque comes? I know who he is, and where he lives. It would save me, and do him no harm." Thus the demon tempted him. "Bah!" said Frank, "I haven't the pluck for it. I can do any amount of filibustering in fancy, but I let the chance go by." Up to that second of time he had only feared that he might be tempted, and had speculated on what he would do if he were. Now, as if some irresistible hand impelled him, he dashed on at full speed after the stumbling drunkard in front, and coming up with him in half-a-minute, laid a hand upon him. The man, supposing it to be one of his late companions, hiccuped "Hillo!"

"Listen to me!" said Frank.

"And who are you?" asked the other, with an oath, reeling from beneath Frank's grasp, and throwing himself into an attitude for defence.

"I am a desperate man," said Frank. "You

have money about you that I want. I don't mean to rob you. I know who you are, and where you live, and I will send the money back again to you, but I *will* have it now. Give me the bag with ninety-eight pounds ten in it."

"Stand off," said the landlord of the *Spotted Dog,* "or I'll blow your brains out! D'ye think I travel down a lane like this without pistols?"

He made a pretence of feeling in his breast-pocket, and in that instant Frank sprang upon him and brought him to the ground. He lay dead-still, and, with a frantic haste and horror such as no words can tell, the abandoned mad man searched for the bag, and found it, and dashed away. He leaped the hedge, and ran in a blind and maddening terror across the field. It was not the dread of anything that might pursue that urged him onward. His fear dwelt within. His abhorrence of the deed before it was fairly done was a thing that language cannot deal with. There is no such Tophet elsewhere as any man may create within the depths of his own soul. He was bound for ever beyond hope of release to that vile footpad who had just struck down the helpless man in the road behind, and he shuddered at that hideous companionship, and shrank from it with inexpressible loathing. Such a hopeless gulf arose between his present self and that happy misery of five minutes since, that as he ran he sobbed and wailed to think of it. He had not been running

for twenty seconds when, with an access of remorse and terror, he stopped, and turned, and hurled the bag away from him with all his strength. Then he ran once more like a madman until breath and strength failed him together, and he fell to the ground.

When he came to himself, the rain had ceased, and a watery moon was shining. He arose weakly, and knew the place in which he found himself. Like a man in a dream, he walked homeward, dragging one weary foot after the other. He was three miles from the scene of his crime, when a coach came rumbling by, and he hailed it, and ordered the coachman to drive him to the square nearest to his rooms. When he reached them, he found the house in darkness, except for his own sitting-room, in which a lamp was burning. He entered, and was surprised to find nothing changed. A whole unfathomable gulf of time lay between him and the hour at which he had left the place. He looked on his table for letters, as a phantom returning to the place known in the flesh might do things once familiar. He opened them, and regarded their contents with an almost added misery. All had been well if he had but suffered that little trouble patiently. It seemed quite a puny trouble now in comparison with this awful companionship with himself, which must be endured for ever. The decanter of brandy from which he had poured a glass before going out was still

upon the table. He seized a tumbler, and helped himself plentifully. Then he took the lamp into his bedroom, undressed, and got into bed. The brandy and his fatigue sent him to sleep, and he lay in heavy forgetfulness until the sun was high.

He awoke with a sense of rest and ease and stretched his arms luxuriously. But the terror which waited for his awaking dropped down upon him as swift as light, and oppressed his soul with anguish. With a strange automatic exactness, he went through the usual routine of his toilet, bathed and then rang for breakfast, and even ate a little. Next he called for a cab, and drove to the bank with Benjamin Hartley's cheque. He opened an account there, and drew one hundred and fifty pounds in notes, and a hundred pounds in gold. It was strange to himself how his thoughts seemed to float on the surface of that fiery sea of remorse which lay burning in him. He looked a little ill and tired, he thought, when he regarded himself in the glass. Could such misery look so unconcerned? he wondered. Could men carry such tragedies as his about the town and not declare them in their looks? What numberless horrors there might be in the world, unguessed of! He drove to Tasker's Place in Acre Buildings, and found the office boy alone. The lad said his master had not yet come; and Frank waited there, and read the paper the boy gave him, and read understandingly and with interest,

whilst that vast sea within lay burning him, and the knowledge of his sin and the eternal presence of his remorse were with him all the time. By-and-by a fellow-countryman of Tasker's came in excitedly, and told the story of the previous night, and stated that Tasker had recovered sufficiently from the first shock of the attack to send for him and to give him a power of attorney; and that he, the fellow-countryman, whose name was Schmidt, was ready to do any business in behalf of Mr. Tasker. He had already been to the police and received the documents found upon his friend's person—amongst them Frank's bill for ninety-eight pounds ten shillings, which he now delivered. Frank paid over a hundred pounds in notes, received his change, put the bill in his pocket-book, drove home, and then burned that fatal paper. He sat awhile after this, and then bethinking him of certain jewels which he had of late been compelled to pawn, he sought out the tickets, and walked to the pawnbroker's and redeemed them. When he had gone, for the first time, thither, he had walked shamefacedly up and down the street in the dusk; but now, memory left him no room for any smaller fear, and he went into the house unconcernedly and emerged with boldness, with the recovered rings already upon his fingers. He returned home, and again sat vacant for a while, and then rising, took a towel, and looking carefully over it to see that it was unmarked, he laid

within it the hundred pounds in gold, and putting it into a cigar-box, sealed it carefully, using a half-crown as a seal. He wrapped the box neatly in brown paper, and putting the parcel into a small travelling-bag, laid it on one side awhile, and walked the streets, and met friends and acquaintances, and talked with them. Some of them remarked that he looked unwell, and he answered that he had been a little worried. So the day passed in idle routine, and the inward tragedy went on. All ambitions, all purities, all innocent pleasures and sweet hopes were dead—drowned in that inward sea of fire. A score of times when the common vacuities of the day failed him, the pain of remorse came with so intense an agony upon him that he could have cried aloud.

He dined at the old Club. Food and wine were flavourless. He went home when the night had fallen, and took up the black travelling-bag, which bore nothing to indicate its owner, and walked by devious ways towards Bloomsbury. In a by-street in Soho he came upon a ticket-porter, who stood alone at the door of a little public-house with a pewter pot in his hand.

"Will you do an errand for me?" Frank asked.

"Yessir," said the man, and bustled into the house with the pewter pot, and returned wiping his lips.

"Take that," said Frank, "to the *Stopped Dog* in Bloomsbury. Do you know it?"

"O yessir," said the ticket-porter.

"Say the gentleman who borrowed it in Spaniard's Lane last night has sent it back again."

"Any name, sir?"

"No. Yes. Thomson."

Frank gave the man a shilling, and he shuffled off. Frank also, bearing his haunting pain with him, went away, and rambled listlessly about the streets. Finally, he went home wearily, and slept a horrible disturbed sleep, full of awful faces and night-fears unseen, and sudden gulfs that opened for him, and seas that drowned him, or floated some ghastly thing up to him slowly out of the depths. He arose in the morning, had his bath, and dressed, and rang for breakfast. The girl who waited upon him lingered a little.

"Do you want anything, Mary?" he asked.

"Why, no sir," said the girl. "But you're looking very ill yesterday and to-day, Mr. Fairholt; and if you'll forgive me for saying so, sir, I think you'd better see a doctor."

Everybody had loved the young fellow, and his kindly generous jollity had enlistened Mary's sympathies these past two years. He dismissed her fears lightly; but she went away with a shake of the head, to indicate that she held her own opinion. Frank toyed languidly with his breakfast

for a time, and then opened the paper. And there out of the printed page this struck him like a blow—"Murder and Robbery in Spaniard's Lane."

CHAPTER XVIII.

HISTORY.

"War's declared! Hurrah! Come and join us."

NEITHER Mr. Tasker nor his assailant gave prospect of early recovery. Tasker had received a terrible shaking; and Closky had been thrown with such force against the railings of Doctor Brand's house, that he incurred a severe concussion of the brain, and made no conscious movement for many days. With the wide benevolence of British charity, which falls like the rain of heaven upon the just and unjust, this man was nursed as carefully for penal servitude as if it had been intended to restore him to lifelong happiness and comfort. The emotions which agitated Mr. Tasker's bosom when he recovered his senses and found that Closky lay in the bed next to him, may in some measure have retarded recovery; but be that as it may, five weeks elapsed before he was able to leave the hospital walls and go in pursuit of the friend and compatriot to whom he had entrusted his affairs. The friend and compatriot was not to be found.

Mr. Tasker found his place of business in Acre Buildings closed; and the inquiries which he caused immediately to be set on foot resulted in a discovery. The compatriot had realised everything realisable, and had disappeared with the proceeds into space. Detective ingenuity revealed the fact that the land to which he had betaken himself was one with which England had no extradition treaty. Tasker's creditors were for the most part of his own people, and had compassion upon him; and he with a true Eastern love for jewellery, had got together in the days of his prosperity a large collection of gauds of value, the which he now disposed of as circumstances pressed him.

When Closky was so far recovered as to be able to endure with safety the first examination before a magistrate, he was taken from the hospital to the police court; and Hastings, Benjamin Hartley, and Dr. Brand met Mr. Tasker there, and gave their evidence. The prisoner was formally committed for trial; and the business being over, Tasker essayed an appeal to his old employer. Mr. Hartley would have none of him, and bade him sternly, if he valued his own freedom, to speak to him no more. Tasker went away sadly and disposed of a jewel, and brokenheartedly drank away the proceeds. He was so crushed, that he made none but the feeblest efforts to recover his position; and he had, moreover, so little will to curb his old propensities to

extravagance, that by the time the trial came on he was at the very edge of the gulf of poverty. The counsel for the prosecution alluded to Tasker's losses, which he deplored in feeling terms as the result of the ruffianly and unprovoked assault of the prisoner. Closky was found guilty, and sentenced to twelve years' transportation beyond the seas. Penkridge sat by Mrs. Closky in court whilst sentence was passed, and took the poor woman out and offered her whisky, which was by that time perhaps the only consolation he knew of.

The necessary attendances at the police court and at the assizes brought Hastings and Dr. Brand together. Hastings took a fancy to the doctor, who returned the young man's liking cordially. Grief for the death of the dearest cannot last for ever, and Hastings was growing reconciled to loss; but he stood steadfast to his resolves, and accepted the responsibilities which his new position threw upon him. Mrs. Brand would fain have enlistened him in the cause of Bolter's Rents; 'but beyond money he could be persuaded to give nothing to that enterprise. The little lady accepted his donation with reluctance, and would have refused it outright, but for the thought of that great ocean of poverty on the shores of which she now walked so often. All this time the rumours of war were growing, and Benjamin Hartley made money as only millionaires made make money when the fate of nations hang in the balance. He was much

in London negotiating on 'Change and in the arcana of Crœsus Brothers and others of that golden breed, for vast coups of financial policy.

One night Will Fairholt walked quietly into the chambers to which Hastings had recently removed in King's Bench Walk, Temple, and where, to keep himself out of harm's way, he was assiduously reading for the bar. Hastings sprang eagerly to salute him. "What brings you to town? Have you any news?"

"None," said Will, shaking his head. "I am here on business. The poor old governor is quite broken, and can attend to nothing." His voice quivered as he spoke, and he looked pale and wretched.

"Will, old friend," said Hastings gently, "you are wearing yourself out. It ought to lie more heavily on me than you; for though, heaven knows, I would do anything now to undo what I did, I know I helped to this miserable end, and that all your strength went to prevent it."

"You meant no wrong," said Will, "nor I; but I'm afraid we all did wrong together. There is nothing to do but to wait now and no hope that waiting will do anything for us."

"The scoundrel who ruined him has met with his deserts," said Hastings; "and there's some comfort any way."

"Little comfort," said Will, shaking his head. —"Hastings," he added suddenly, "I must tell

somebody, or I shall go mad. Before this terrible thing happened, and poor Frank disappeared, he and I were rivals. And I feel sometimes so hideous a temptation to be glad that he is gone and out of my way, that it is killing me." Saying this, he buried his hands and leaned above the table.

"A morbid dread of a foolish shadow, Will, believe me," his friend said kindly. "I know you better. A casuist torment, which a man of your conscientious and sensitive nature is safe to create for himself as often as he can. No, no, Will. Don't fight phantoms of that sort any longer. Turn daylight on them. You are worn and tired just now. Come into the streets, and let the wind blow the cobwebs from your brain." He clapped his companion on the shoulder.

Will arose without a word, and they went out together. They passed up the silent walk, and through the narrow way beyond it, and came out at Temple Bar, where they turned westward. As they passed the western church, there broke upon the air the sound of a scattered cheer, and then another and another. A chance acquaintance of Hastings' came by at that moment arm-in-arm with a friend, and turning at the sound of the cheering, lifted his hat and shouted "Hurrah!"

"What's the matter, Ward?" asked Hastings, laying his hand upon the arm of the man who cheered. "Is war declared?"

"Hillo!" cried the other, turning round. "That you, Hastings? Now, old man, you always said that if there were any fighting to be done, you'd get a commission. Go for it. Now's your time."

"Is war declared?" Hastings asked again.

"Yes," roared the other in reply. "War's declared! Hurrah! Come and join us. We shall sail in less than a week."

The street was full of excited people. Stranger questioned stranger. Men who had never seen each other before shook hands upon the news, and cheered. Some doubted, some denied, but all were wild at the prospect, and the general heart beat with a fierce joy. Rickety clerks and pale shopmen felt the blood tingle in their thin veins, and were ready to march and fight and die. Most people after this lapse of a quarter of a century have come to believe that the terrible and splendid crusade of '54 was a huge blunder; but the large soul of England was throbbing to the old heroic music then, and beat to another measure than that mean tune of '77, which still jars on our ears. It was the old great mission on which the sons of this Mother of the Nations were going —to lay the oppressor low, and to succour them that had no other helper, and to hold Europe clean of tyranny. A great purpose, and howsoever it failed or fell, carried through with a great spirit. Ay! and even you--pale shopman and rickety clerk—had a right to cheer in such a cause; and

it was well for you that your thin blood ran warm and tingled, and well for the land that bore you that your hearts responded to her call.

Hastings' chance acquaintance went eastward, cheering still, and left the two friends facing each other, pale and excited.

"I shall volunteer," said Hastings, catching Will by the arm, and walking on rapidly.

"I wish I could," said Will sighing. He caught his breath at the thought. No; it was not possible. His father was dying. He could not leave him to bear the burden of his griefs alone.

"At last," said Hastings, hurried by the excitement of the time into forgetfulness of his companion's sorrows and his own— "At last the world has something in it for a man to do. I'm told they fight—these fellows; and it won't be an easy business. But to think, Will, to think that at last we are let loose with leave to pull that bragging bully down. *Ça ira, ça ira, ça ira,*" he sang under his breath, and marched on wildly, with Will silent at his side.

Hastings went to work next morning; and before Will Fairholt left town, rushed in upon him with news that he was certainly going to the Crimea. Will heard him sadly, but congratulated him with all his heart, and envied him not a little. All *he* could do was to go home, and make the poor old father's last days a little lighter than they could be without him. And he had within him—

or so he held it—a greater enemy than the Czar of all the Russias could bring against him. So when the time came, he went back home, and soothed the old man's fretful grief, and buried his own, and lived in outward melancholy quiet, and prayed hard, poor soul, and did his duty, and found no rest.

When Frank read that terrible heading to the paragraph in the morning paper, he sat still for a moment, stunned. Then he smoothed the paper out mechanically, and folded it, and read the hard dry narrative through. It ran thus: —

"Early yesterday morning, two men, named respectively Isaac Shakell and John Turner, were proceeding to work, when they were arrested by the sight of a well-dressed figure which lay prostrate in the mud in Spaniard's Lane, at a distance of about three hundred yards from the *Spaniard's Inn*. The figure was that of a man of about twenty-five years of age. He was quite dead, and had apparently lain there all night, for his clothes were saturated with mud and rain. Letters were found upon him, addressed to James Groves at the *Spotted Dog Tavern*, Bloomsbury. Inquiries were at once set on foot; and the deceased was immediately identified as the landlord of that well-known hostel. All that is known of this tragic incident is that, at a late hour on the previous evening, the deceased left the *Spaniard's Inn* inn

the society of two friends, who returned almost at once, and shortly afterwards left the house for that of a gentleman in the neighbourhood, with whom they spent the night. These gentlemen agree in stating that the deceased was in a condition to take care of himself. When the body was found, the head rested upon a large and jagged stone, upon which he had evidently fallen backwards. Except for the wound thus produced, which was clearly the cause of death, there were no marks of violence upon his person. A pocket in the breast of his overcoat was turned inside out, and a chamois-leather bag, known to have contained the sum of ninety-eight pounds ten shillings in notes and gold, had been abstracted. The police on visiting the spot believed that they could discern evidences of a brief struggle, and their attention being called to a breach in the hedge near at hand, they succeeded in tracing the footsteps for some distance. The most singular fact in the whole of this mysterious and tragic business is, that the bag above alluded to was found at the side of the field, at some distance from the track left by the footsteps of the criminal, and that a purse containing a considerable sum of money was found on the person of the deceased. The police have as yet no clue to the perpetrator of this apparently purposeless outrage."

After this came another paragraph, headed "Mysterious Restitution"; which set forth that a

ticket-porter had delivered a package containing a sum of one hundred pounds in gold at the *Spotted Dog Tavern*, with the statement that the gentleman who borrowed it on the previous evening in Spaniard's Lane had sent it back again.

All this, understanding it quite clearly, Frank read over, and then laid the paper down. He put on a velvet wideawake, and left the house, and walked quietly away. Nobody paid him any unusual regard, and he walked on, not knowing where he went, and not caring. He passed through Uxbridge and the two Wycombes; and night fell as he entered on that lonely stretch of country which lies northward on the Oxford Road. He had not tasted food or drink, although he had put thirty miles between himself and home since he started. Nor did he feel any want of food or drink, or think of anything but the one consuming terror which dwelt with him. The inexorable terrible past set its pillar of cloud by day before him, and its pillar of fire by night. All day long the sordid and hideous crime of which he had been guilty enacted itself in shadowy form before him, and in the night it glared in fiery lines. Fire seemed within and without him as the weary automatic feet went on, hour after hour, hour after hour, until, before the eastern skies were grey, he sank from sheer exhaustion, and lay until the sun aroused him from dreams which enacted his crime with horrible iteration. He rose again, and once

more the automatic feet carried him on. Where he had lain on the bare road, he was mud from head to heel. His eyes were bleared with the sleepless agony of his soul, and his knees bent beneath him. Country people passing him stared and laughed and pointed, believing him to be tipsy. He scarcely saw them as he staggered by. Coming to a little village inn, he entered, and called for bread-and-cheese and ale. He tendered a sovereign, and was going away without the change, when the host ran after him and placed it in his hand. He took it like a man in a dream, and roamed on again with all his senses clouded by the action of the food he had taken, by the fatigue he had undergone and the aching pains which followed his rest upon the muddy road. Yet the cloudy presentment of his tragedy was still before him in the cloud, and the dry fire of remorse burned on within him. And he knew that though he lived beyond the uttermost span of human years the fire would burn.

Thus with horrible automatic step, without volition of his own, he walked on slowly and more slowly, until he reached the little town of Thame. It was with no thought of escaping the detecting hand of justice that he avoided the better sort of inns. Exhausted nature cried aloud for food and sleep; but he went wearily about the town until he came upon a little public-house in a by-street, and ate coarse food there ravenously and without

relish, and then mounted the rickety stairs, and threw himself upon the uninviting bed and slept. Through the dark hollows of the night his dread walked with him, nameless, indefinable, full of unspeakable fear, unrecognised. When he awoke, he knew the companion of his sleep; and first as an added terror, and then as a first faint gleam of hope, and then again as an added terror came the thought, "I shall go mad!"

The landlord and the landlady of the place had been discussing him, and when he descended the rickety stairs in the morning, the landlord questioned him.

"Might I make bold to ask where you're agoin', mate?" asked the landlord.

Frank had not thought of going anywhere, but had started on that vainest off all vain enterprises, the attempt to outwalk himself. But he answered "Liverpool," thinking that would do as well as another place, and that he would go there.

"You bain't a seafarin' man?" said the landlord, pursuing his inquiry.

"No," said Frank.

"Lookin' out for a job anywheer?"

"No," said Frank again.

"Got money, maybe?" said the landlord.

"I have enough to pay your bill," Frank answered, weary of the questions, but scarcely resenting them.

"That's right enough," returned the host; "a

man's business *is* a man's business, and yourn ain't mine, and mine ain't yourn. But I suppose you can guess as it looks odd to see a man like you a-coming into a place like this." Frank returned no answer, though the landlord waited. By-and-by he went on again. "You've been on the loose, I reckon?"

"Suppose I have," Frank returned, lifting his eyes for the first time. "That gives you no right to question me. What do I owe you?"

"That's reasonable enough," said the landlord; "but a man like you can't help knowin' as it's suspicious-like, don't you see—"

"Will that pay you?" Frank asked, laying five shillings on the table.

"For a gentleman as doesn't want no questions asked, and doesn't want to be interfered with," said the landlord, "I think an extra five bob ud be the handsome thing."

Frank laid down two other half-crowns, and went his his way without further question. The landlord looked after him, jingling the ten shillings in his hand as he stood. His wife looked over his shoulder at the retreating limping figure. "Poor young gentleman!" said she; "I wonder what's wrong with him? He's in some sort o trouble."

"Ah!" said the landlord, shaking his head with an air of prophecy, "we shall hear of *him* again. He's done something!" and with this sage

conclusion, the landlord walked indoors, and threw the ten shillings into the till.

"I thought he was a gentleman," said the landlady, "directly I set eyes on him, for all the dirt on his clothes."

"Anybody could ha' seen that," said the landlord, "if he'd had a heavylaunch o' mud on him."

Frank went onward in the old mood. There was a gap between his common life and this which looked back dimly and with a lack of interest not easy to understand, on a happy life which somebody else seemed to have led a long long time ago. And all this time he never said to himself, "I am miserable," or "My punishment is heavy," or had any really conscious form of thought at all, except for instants of time, when Memory stabbed him, and then he always fell back into the dreamy horror which had before possessed him. Late that night it rained, and he was out upon a lonely road with only one light in sight, and that shone ruby red in the darkness. The road led him towards this light, and the telegraph wires made a mourning noise in the wind as he plashed along below them. Losing the red light now and then among the trees as the road twisted, he found himself suddenly below it, and near a railway arch. A set of wooden steps led towards the rustic railway station, and not knowing why, he stood before them in the rain until the far-off

roar and whistle of an approaching train reached his ears. Still scarcely knowing why, he mounted the wet steps, and faced a porter who was stamping down the platform in a gleaming tarpaulin cloak.

"Going by this train?" said porter. "She doesn't stop till Rugby."

"Give me a ticket for Rugby," Frank answered. It mattered nothing where he went, and he allowed chance to drift him.

The train came lumbering up, and he entered one of the carriages. But for himself it was empty; and as he sat there, the monotonous clank of carriage and engine sent him to sleep, and for an hour he was at peace. But Remorse stood ready for him with that Nessus cloak of torment which she carries, and wrapped him in the fiery shroud when he awoke. So in the rain, he turned into the streets of the familiar town. He had spent the happiest hours of his life, the happiest years there, as many hundreds of English gentlemen had done before, and have done since his day. And as he walked about the silent rainy streets, the magic of things familiar laid a hand upon him, until recalling what he had been, he was seized with such a passion of self-pity, that he laid his head down upon a garden-wall and wept as if his heart would break. As if his heart would break? His heart was broken.

Though pity for himself unsealed his tears—

and few men ever weep tears of real passion but at the bidding of their own sorrows, and not another's — his soul, unclouded for a moment, looked back, and saw all whom he had left and lost who loved him, and he wept for their sakes and for the tears which they would weep. And thereby—as I would fain believe—God's hand of healing for the first time touched that sinful and suffering soul. Shine out, Repentance, with angelic eyes, sweet opposite of harsh Remorse, shine out; and lead us to a purer stream than Lethe's, which is all Remorse dare pray for!

THE END.

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